Be prepared, or, The boy scouts in Florida

Anthony Weston Dimock

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"THEY TURNED ASIDE TO THE BIG CYPRESS SWAMP"

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BE PREPARED

OR

THE BOY SCOUTS IN FLORIDA

BY

A. W. DIMOCK

WITH EIGHT HALFTONE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. A. DIMOCK

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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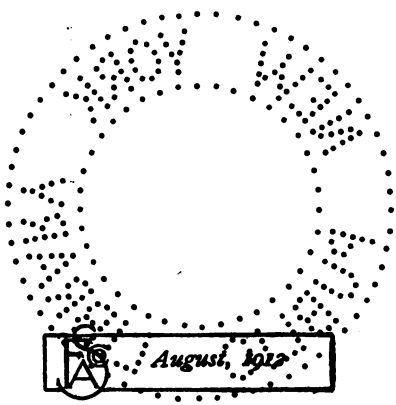

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Outfitting	1
II	Canoeing on the Gulf Coast	12
III	The Panther of the Royal Palm Hammock	26
IV	Through the Slough of Despond	42
V	Lost on the Prairie	54
VI	House Building	66
VII	A Fight with an Alligator	79
VIII	The Everglades	94
IX	An Emergency Ration	106
X	The Interrupted Feast	120
XI	In the Big Cypress	133
XII	Sharpshooting	146
XIII	The Phantom Trail	160
XIV	The Meeting in the Everglades	176
XV	The Boy Scouts' Camp on the Prairie	189
XVI	Trailing a Hunter	204
XVII	The Parting at Okeechobee	221

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"They turned aside to the Big Cypress Swamp." . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"They found some boys running a net for pompano." 17

"'Look! There are the Royal Palms!'" 26

"'Prairie fire's coming like a race horse! We've got to scoot!'" . . 33

"He came to a mangrove thicket." . 59

"'The coon will hold the camp for the Boy Scouts.'" 132

"They left Conapatchee standing in full ceremonial costume beside his home." 176

"'There's a big, old alligator in the trail. Shall I shoot him?'" . . 227

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CHAPTER I

OUTFITTING

"FRECKLES!"

No answer.

"Bobbie!"

"What is it, Jim?"

"Remember our camp on the prairie last year?"

"Wish I could forget it. Makes me homesick to think it's all over."

"Who says it's all over?"

"James Howard, you've been thinking! I wouldn't have believed it of you. I thought you were asleep. Let's see our folks about it this minute. Hooray!"

"Don't go off at half-cock, Bob.

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We've got to manage discreetly. You begin quietly with your mother and she'll fix your father. I'll talk with Mother and then we'll be primed to tackle Dad together."

"Jim, you make me think of:

'An Austrian army, awfully arrayed,
Boldly by battery besieged Belgrade.'

Go ahead with your siege; I'll capture my family by assault."

James Howard and Robert Ramsey, neighbors in their northern home, had been spending some weeks with their parents in Fort Myers, Florida. The father of James was one of the organizers of the Boy Scouts of America, of which the boys were enthusiastic members, James being a Second Class Scout and Robert a Tenderfoot, whom the former had enlisted in compliance with the twelfth condition of admission as a First Class Scout.

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James stood high in his classes at school, was a favorite with his teachers and well liked by his schoolmates, while an exasperated instructor once said of Robert that he was a red-headed, freckled, lovable imp. It was exuberant spirits that troubled the boy and when the beautiful outdoors beckoned with its wonderful life he really couldn't stay inside and dig out Greek roots. Robert was romantic and a poet at heart and so if it sometimes happened that Evangeline or the Song of Hiawatha got between his eyes and the theorems and problems with which one Euclid afflicted the world of boys, we must not blame him too much. Sometimes he fell behind in his studies, until his mother reproached him with a look of sadness that was mostly assumed, after the manner of mothers. Then the remorseful Robert took to his books, studied so diligently and rose in his class so rapidly that, if his mother hadn't known him

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pretty well, she might have feared his becoming too angelic.

When the young conspirators next met, James said to his companion:

"I've been talking to Mother about the fun we had camping last year. I wanted to prepare her mind a little before asking if I could go again."

"Prepare her grandmother, Jim! Why, your mother knew what you were after before you had said two words."

"How much did you say to your mother, Bob?"

"Said all there was to say, in just as plain words as possible. Told her exactly what we wanted to do and asked her to help me with Father."

"What did she say?"

"She first took my face between her two hands—you know how she does it—and looked kinder sad for a minute and then smiled into my eyes as she said, 'If Jim's father and mother think it's safe for him to go, I shall be glad to

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have my boy go with him. And I can almost promise you your father's permission, too.' Say, Jim, mothers *are* nice."

"Ours are, Bobbie. Now we are ready to talk to Dad."

"But first, Jim, I forgot to tell you that Mother asked when we wanted to start, and I said to-morrow morning, and she thinks we are going by ourselves. Couldn't you work that on your father?"

"Forget it, Bob. It's a pipe dream."

The young Boy Scouts found Mr. Howard in the library, and as he saw their eager faces he laid down his book and said:

"Prisoners at the bar, what is your plea? Guilty, or not guilty? You look guilty."

"Guilty of wanting to go on a Boy Scout hike," replied the younger boy, quickly, while James, speaking slowly, said:

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"May Robert and I go on a hunt this year, same as last?"

"I am willing, if Mr. Ramsey is."

"Then it's all settled, Dad, for Mr. Ramsey says he'll stand for anything you say."

"Have you got it settled with your mothers, too?"

"We're solid with them. Both of 'em put it up to you. Now I'll hunt up Frank Brown."

"What do you want of him?"

"Why, you know he was our guide last year."

"Last year, yes, but I hoped that this year you wouldn't need a nurse. It isn't real hunting to hire a guide to hunt for you."

"You don't mean, Dad, that we can go cruising, camping, and hunting just by ourselves? I never dreamed of anything so lovely."

"I don't know why you shouldn't. You are fair canoeists, good swimmers,

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and know enough of camping for this country. Remember that Robert is two years younger than you and always keep him on your mind. Then live up to the motto of your order, 'Be prepared,' and you will be as safe in the wilderness as at home."

"What would 'being prepared' do for us if we got lost in the big swamp?"

"Save you from a panic, which is more dangerous than all the beasts and reptiles in the country. Being prepared means keeping your wits about you. You are sure to get lost, but when it happens and you begin to be anxious and excited, stop right where you are, until you are calm, if it takes all night. Then decide on your course and stick to it, whether it leads westward to the Gulf, eastward to the Everglades, northward in search of a road, or along some water-course."

"How soon may we start?" asked the boy.

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"As soon as you choose. You and Robert make your own plans and tell me of them when they are completed. Remember that the wise camper is known by the things he does without."

There was a meeting of the Howard and Ramsey families that evening to listen to the plans for a cruise by the pirate crew, as Mrs. Ramsey called them.

"We are going in my little Peterboro canoe," said James.

"And we start at daylight to-morrow," interrupted Robert.

"We are going down the coast to Rodgers River and up the river to where we hunted—"

"I am going to carry my new twenty-two take-down and Jim says his kodak is going with him," interposed the younger boy.

"Robert," said his father, "it's contrary to discipline for a 'Tenderfoot' Boy Scout to interrupt his superior, of the 'Second Class.' Better let James

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tell your plans, and when he has finished you can talk as long as you can find listeners."

"I'll keep as still as I can," replied the boy. "You go ahead, Jim."

"Robert and I have agreed to travel light and live on the country. Our canoe weighs forty pounds and all our supplies and the rest of our dunnage amounts to less than thirty pounds for the two of us to carry. We can pick up our canoe any time and hike across the country with it, and when we are afloat we will need ballast to hold us down."

"That is all right for a dream," said Mr. Howard, "but you may have practical needs like eating and sleeping. What provision have you made for these?"

"I'll give you a list of everything in the outfit. There's the canoe with paddles, a light pole, little harpoon, one hundred feet of one-eighth-inch line, and a five-gallon can for water. We wear

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our Scout uniforms with haversack and each of us carries a large flannel-covered canteen, small stew-pan, large tin cup, hatchet, waterproof match-box, compass, large pocket-knife, fork, spoon, needles, thread, comb, and tooth-brush. Robert takes his rifle with fifty cartridges, I take my kodak with films, and we have, in common, a cheesecloth mosquito-bar with canvas top, which will serve as tent, fish-hooks and lines, ten pounds of corn-meal, five pounds of bacon, and a little bag of salt."

"How soon will your outfit be ready?" inquired Mr. Ramsey.

"Everything but the mosquito-bar is already packed in the canoe and that will be ready for us at daylight."

"But what do you boys expect to eat?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Ramsey. "If I tried to feed Robbie at home on pork and mush, he would probably say there was 'nothing doing.'"

"But, Mother, don't you know it's

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different when you're camping? You can eat everything then and besides, didn't you hear Jim say that we'd live on the country? That means clams and oysters and wild turkeys and fish and venison—perhaps—and all kinds of fruit—"

"All the same, Robbie," interrupted his mother, "I'll have a basket of lunch ready for you in the morning, enough to feed you till you reach Punta Rassa. Then if you change your mind about the trip you can come back on the steamboat."

"If you find me on that steamer you may put me back in the nursery and I won't kick. You ought to encourage me and tell me to come back with my shield or on it."

"I am afraid I am not a Spartan mother, Robbie.'

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CHAPTER II

CANOEING ON THE GULF COAST

WHEN the boys dipped their paddles in the Caloosahatchee the next morning, the rays of the rising sun were lighting up hundreds of acres of the beautiful water-hyacinth that covered the surface of the river from bank to bank. The plants were like floating bubbles surrounded by masses of delicate fibers, and yielded with little resistance to the strokes of the paddle. But the tentacles clung to the canoe in numbers so vast that its progress was snail-like. Robert dipped his paddle so impatiently that his calmer companion warned him:

"Go easy, there! This is more dangerous than the big storm waves of the Gulf. I don't believe you could swim

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to shore through this tangle, so we mustn't take any chance of a spill."

Soon the field of flowers was broken into patches by the tide, which so favored the boys that three hours of brisk paddling carried them to Punta Rassa, where San Carlos Bay and the Gulf beyond opened out before them. They paddled across the channel to Sanibel Island and ate their lunch on the beach to the music of the surf, afterwards climbing the lighthouse stairs for a hundred feet by way of resting from their labors of the morning.

It was yet early in the day when they again embarked and heading down the coast quartered the big waves that, rolling in from the west, alternately lifted the canoe to their crests and lowered it to the valleys between. Robert became nervous as the waves rolled higher, and, kneeling in the bow of the canoe as it slid far down in the depths, he looked up at the towering crests that seemed al-

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ways about to burst before the uplifting bow tossed him above them.

"It's all right, Robbie," said James, "and a whole lot safer than your flower garden this morning."

But the waves grew bigger as the wind freshened and the canoe passed from the shelter of the shoal to the deeper water off Big Carlos Pass. James held the canoe just outside the main line of breakers and all was going smoothly with them when suddenly a new line formed and a great wave burst as the bow of their craft was rising upon it. Robert was drenched and James sprinkled, while the breaking wave roared in their ears and the carpet of foam on the flattened water swirled and hissed about them.

James was proud to see that his protégé never shrank from the shock nor intermitted a stroke of his paddle. As the canoe was smoothly riding the following wave, he called to his companion:

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"I'm going to head for the beach, Robbie. Hold her steady through the breakers. If we let her swing we'll have to swim."

"Don't go in on my account, for I've got used to it now and enjoy it."

The canoe was turned toward the shore and a little quick paddling, as the next roller lifted it, held the craft on the swelling front of the big wave till it broke and swept the little canoe and its contents well up the beach. Before the coming of the next wave the canoe was resting beneath a palmetto fifty feet beyond its sweep.

The boys wandered inland to the nearby Estero Bay and gathered oysters that clung in bunches to the mangrove trees. They found a flat where little holes made by the suckers of soft-shelled clams showed them where to dig for their supper. They cut the bud out of a cabbage-palm, and gathering fuel along the beach, sat down beside their first camp-fire to a

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repast of roasted oysters, soft-shelled clams, and boiled cabbage—the bread of the Crackers—all served upon palmetto leaves. They had gathered armfuls of Spanish moss for their bed and as the evening advanced lay upon it, watching the tiny jets of green flame that burst from their camp-fire, so colored by the copper salts from the decomposed nails and sheathing of the old ship whose wreckage fed their fire.

The romantic Robert rebuilt those old ships from his imagination, manned them with cutthroats of many races, gave them cruel captains and a blood-thirsty pirate commander who smote heads with his cutlass by day and struck chords on his mandolin at night. Robert had loaded his pirate ships with gold and jewels, filled their cabins with beauty in distress, and was organizing a rescuing band in command of his companion and himself when he discovered that Jim had gone to sleep.

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"THEY FOUND SOME BOYS RUNNING A NET FOR POMPANO"

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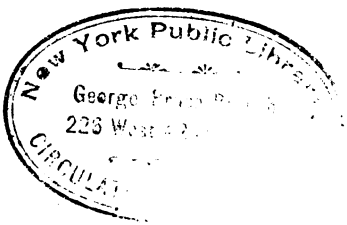

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There were three rows of breakers on the beach in the morning and to have launched their cockleshell of a canoe through them would have risked all their stores, so the boys carried their craft down to the nearest pass, within which they launched it, and coming out through its channel took the three lines of breakers without shipping three spoonfuls of water. As they paddled down the coast their small canoe with its five inches of freeboard was a little thing among the waves, but when Robbie saluted with his paddle a big sea-going yacht which they met, its smiling commander responded by dipping his colors. They made camp in the afternoon beside a cocoanut-grove, near which they found some boys running a net for pompano out from the beach.

"That's the finest fish in the world and I wish I could eat another," said Robert sadly as he loosened his belt and looked at the few bones left from two pompano

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that must have weighed nearly three pounds apiece.

At Marco the boys went ashore to mail letters home and were offered the freedom of the island in the matter of fruit. Captain Collier, who owns the place, and whose name is borne by the beautiful bay that borders it, loaned the boys a big basket and went with them to see that they filled it. As they started up the bay, on the way, as they hoped, to Coon Key, their canoe sat low on the water and Robert said to his chum:

"I wish Mother could see us now. It's tummy-aches instead of starvation she'd worry about. I don't remember the names of half the fruits we gathered."

"I do, for I wrote 'em all down—I wonder which way we turn here; these streams are about alike, but the one to the left is a little the biggest, so we'll try that."

They followed the stream until it broadened into a large shallow bay

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bounded by mangrove-swamps, and paddled around its borders without finding a navigable outlet. Returning, they took the stream to the right, which again divided and soon involved them in a tangle of crooked little channels wandering about in a mangrove-swamp.

"Our course is southeast," said James, "and we had better follow this creek that runs that way."

But the creek was crooked as a corkscrew and after making many turns they found themselves paddling due west. Daylight was fading and there appeared swarms of mosquitoes that make musical the nights in Florida swamps.

"Guess we're lost, and we'll be eaten up by morning," said Robert, as he stopped paddling to slap a bunch of mosquitoes that had settled on his cheek.

"Lost nothing," exclaimed his companion. "Marco may be lost and we can't find Coon Key, but we know where we are and that's just here. We can run

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the canoe among these mangrove roots so that it won't spill us out and then pull the mosquito-bar over our heads for the night."

"The tide's carrying us along pretty lively, Jim. Why not go with it, long as we can see? Maybe it'll fetch us out."

"Bully for you, Robbie!" was the reply, and fifteen minutes' paddling, helped by the tide, brought the boys to a shaky little dock built of poles from which a short path led to a little pine-apple plantation. The shack on the place was empty, for the owner lived near Marco, but the boys built a camp-fire and rigged their mosquito-bar tent near the landing. They made torches of dried palmetto fans and by their light carried stores to the camp from the canoe.

"Now watch me make a hoe-cake in ten minutes," said James, as he dipped a cup of corn-meal from a bag.

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"Then see me eat it in five," retorted Robert as he toasted some thin strips of bacon.

Half an hour later a motion by Robert to sample the Collier fruits was carried unanimously and the boys settled down to the task.

"This alligator-pear," said Robert, after he had eaten about a pound of the luscious flesh of that incomparable fruit, "is food to eat, clothes to wear, and a house to live in, but what's that thing you're eating?"

"It's a melon-papaw, spicier than a muskmelon and bigger than three of them."

"What's this lump of sugar?" asked Robert as he held up a small fruit from which he had taken a big bite.

"It's a sugar-apple. Try a lime with it and you'll think you're eating lemonade. But here's the best fruit in the bunch, the mango, only it ought to be eaten in a bath-tub. It is built like a

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peach, but the flesh sticks to the big seed so tightly that you can't eat it without getting into a mess with the sticky juice."

"Then I'll try some of that queer fruit that wears its seed outside."

"That's the cashew, and this little fruit, with the color and taste of a pumpkin, is a tiess. Don't eat too many of those mastic berries or they'll make your mouth so sore that you can't speak the truth."

"How did you find that out, Jim? The whole roof of my mouth is plastered so thick with glue that I can't talk."

"Don't try," and for a time they ate in silence, devouring figs and sapadilloes, bananas and cocoa plums, grape fruit and guavas, tamarinds and tangerines, ending their repast with green cocoanuts from which they drank the milk and ate the custard with a spoon. Supper ended, they soon crawled under their bar and the power that gives boys a miracu-

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lous digestion presided over their dreamless slumbers.

"What's that?" was Jim's startled question as he heard a shot just outside the tent in the morning, and rising on his elbow saw that his companion was no longer there.

"I shot one of those little brown Florida rabbits."

"What did you do that for?"

"He was eating a pineapple that didn't belong to him, and, besides, I'm qualifying for a Second Class Scout."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Test eight is to cook a quarter of a pound of meat and two potatoes in the open, and that rabbit is my meat."

"How about the potatoes?"

"I dug two in the garden up by the house."

"It's qualifying for the jug you are and I'll be out there soon and discipline you."

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"Come on and I'll qualify under test two."

"I forget what that is."

"First aid to the injured. That'll leave me shy only one test—tracking half a mile in twenty-five minutes—and I mean to make good on that this trip."

"How about laying a fire in the open with two matches?"

"Did it with one this morning and can do it again with my eyes shut. You can get up now, for breakfast is ready."

The boys had exhausted their bad luck in the evening and two hours' paddling in the morning brought them in sight of Coon Key and the Gulf beyond. But a gale was blowing on shore, kicking up an ugly sea, and much of the coast below was rough and rocky.

"I don't like to tackle that," said James. "We must wait for the wind to go down."

"What's the matter with cutting out the coast and striking inland from here?

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We don't have to wait for Rodgers River before beginning to explore."

"Good idea, Robbie," and the bow of the canoe was turned toward the head of the bay, while James continued, "we'll look for the Royal Palm Hammock, which lies back here somewhere."

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CHAPTER III

THE PANTHER OF THE ROYAL PALM HAMMOCK

AT the head of the bay the young explorers found a large creek through which a favoring tide poured swiftly. It swept them through crooked channels between narrow banks and oyster reefs.

"If the tide doesn't change we'll never get back," said Robert, as he fended the bow of the canoe from an oyster reef that might have cut it open.

"If the tide doesn't turn we can carry the canoe overland. But look! See the tops of those tall trees looming above the mangroves? They must be the Royal Palms."

"I hope this stream will take us there, but it is headed the wrong way now."

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"'LOOK! THERE ARE THE ROYAL PALMS!'"

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Soon a creek opened leading to their goal and they made their camp that night in a grove of the grandest trees in the southern country,—the magnificent Royal Palms. Mosquitoes were few and the boys lay outside their bar near the wavering camp-fire flames, which cast shadows of goblins and ghosts of ancient knights in armor and of bird-men of to-day, upon the foliage of the trees about them. Glimpses of the moon, through fast-flying fleecy clouds and between the great trees that towered above him, went to the brain of the romantic Robert, and he could not sleep for excitement.

"Was there ever anything so lovely in the world, Jim? Talk about the hardships of explorers! Why, it's all one jolly picnic."

"But sometimes explorers go hungry and suffer from cold, or face fierce beasts and fiercer men."

"Not in this country, Jim. Why, I

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never lived so high in my life, and we started out with nothing but a little meal and pork, and I hate 'em both—when I'm home. Think of the oysters, the acres of them that we walk over and the millions growing on the trees around us, the clams that are just waiting to be picked up, the fish that crowd the waters—you remember one jumped in the canoe this morning—and the fruit! Yum, Yum! Then we'll get a buck in the morning. You know we saw a doe and fawn this afternoon. And Jim?—I believe that boy's asleep!"

"Robbie," whispered Jim excitedly, the next morning, just as the day was breaking, "don't speak or move! Look where I'm pointing!"

"It's an awful big beast. What do you s'pose it is?"

"It must be a mountain-lion. They call it a panther in this country."

"It's watching us like a cat. See it

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move its tail! S'pose it's coming for us?"

"Not till you shoot it and then it'll be dead, unless you've lost your nerve."

"Think I'd better fire at it?"

"Sure, but don't hurry. Take up your rifle as gently as if you were pulling jackstraws out of a bunch. Sight for his eye if you can see it. Wait, wait, he's coming nearer."

The lion came on until he was within less than a hundred feet, when he stopped, and the next instant came the report of Robert's rifle. With a scream the beast disappeared in the brush, while the boys sprang to their feet.

"You hit him, Robbie, but I'm afraid you didn't get him in the brain."

"I didn't try to. The light was so bad that I couldn't see the sight very well and I was afraid of missing his head, so I thought I'd break his shoulder and I fired at that."

"Best thing, probably," said James,

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as they hurried toward the place where the cat had stood.

"Bully for you!" he continued in wild excitement. "You've got him, sure! See the blood on the ground and the tracks where he's gone off on three legs. Now track him half a mile in twenty-five minutes and you'll make good gloriously on your fourth test."

"Twenty-five minutes!" exclaimed Robert as he looked at the plain tracks in the soft mud; "I can do it in ten, easy as falling off a log."

But he didn't win out on the test, for before he had traveled two hundred yards he came upon the lion lying down in a bunch of grass. This time the bullet from Robbie's rifle passed through the brain of the beast. As the boy held the paw of his victim, whose weight was twice that of himself, the throbbing of his heart made his hand tremble like a leaf.

"Were you nervous, Bob, when the

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great brute came walking so softly straight toward you?"

"Not a bit. I was just praying that he would come so near that I couldn't miss if I tried. But now I couldn't hit a barn if I was inside."

"We must get busy right after breakfast and round-skin your lion, saving the skull and paws. Won't your folks be proud of the rug it will make, and of you, too!"

Skinning the beast, scraping the skin and salting it as well as their limited supply of salt would permit, and cleaning the skull, used up most of the day. During the evening and night they kept the skin in the smoke of a smothered fire and proposed to repeat the treatment from time to time until it was safe from spoiling. Robert was used up when evening came but he had an active night. For in his dreams, when he wasn't killing the lion, the lion was killing him.

The next morning the boys renewed

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their explorations. They followed crooked creeks through mangrove thickets and across meadows and when they became unnavigable they carried the canoe overland to others, making double portages because of their cargo of fruit. They started several deer but all were does and they had agreed that until driven to it by hunger they would shoot neither doe nor fawn. Their unselfishness received its reward for as Robert turned sadly from a doe that he had thought was a buck, his eye caught sight of a fat gobbler almost hidden in the grass, and a Thanksgiving dinner was assured to the boys. They camped for the night beneath a tall palmetto in the midst of a meadow through which ran the little stream they were on.

"How about explorers going hungry and being in peril from wild beas" asked Robert as he cut a chunk, the size of a baby, out of the breast of the big bird. "Wild beasts walk up and ask us

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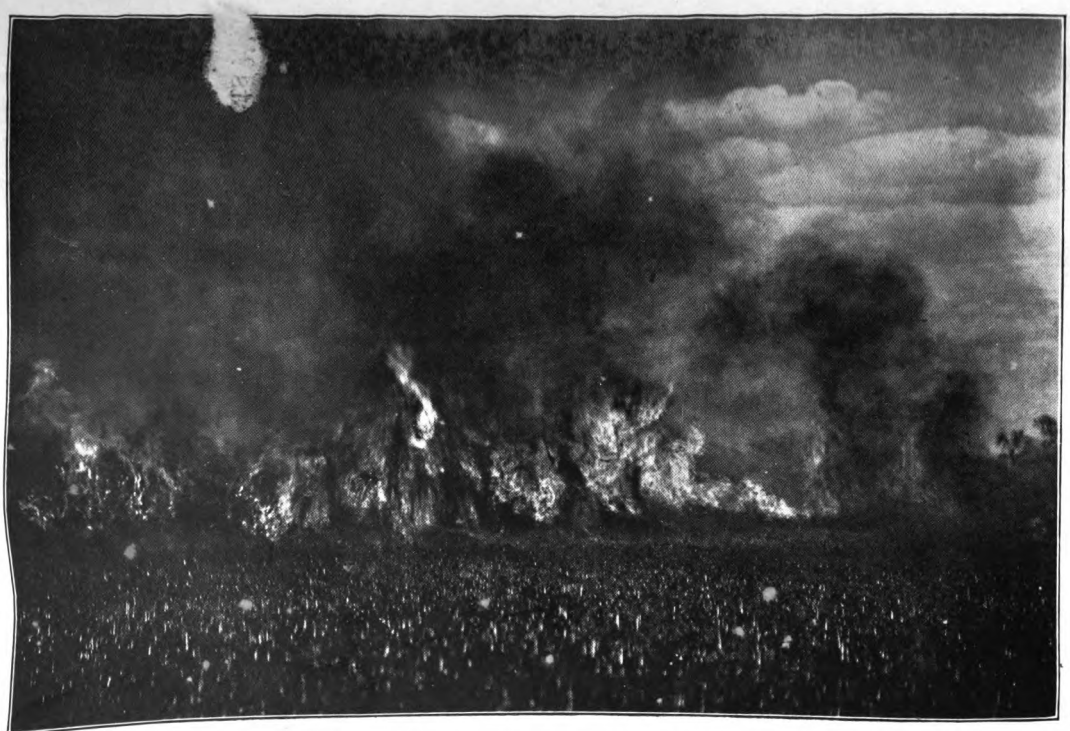

"'PRAIRIE FIRE'S COMING LIKE A RACE HORSE! WE'VE GOT TO SCOOT!'"

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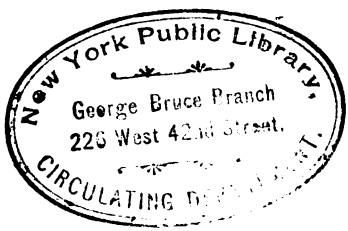

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to kindly kill and make rugs of them, while fat gobblers waddle around, begging us to eat them."

"Such luck can't last and we'd better 'be prepared' for trouble," replied James as he lay down in the lee of the canoe for protection from a gale that was beginning to sweep the prairie. Robert soon curled up beside him and the tired boys fell into a dreamless sleep.

"Wake up, Bob, wake up!"

"I can't breathe, Jim, for the horrible smoke. It's choking me," gasped Robert.

"Prairie fire's coming like a race horse! We've got to scoot!" and Jim, half-dragging his comrade, started across the boggy prairie.

The howling gale almost lifted them from their feet and sent black clouds of smoke swirling about the boys, choking them as they stumbled along. The deep roar from the forest behind them as the trees bent to the fiery blast was like the

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roar of old ocean when its tempest-driven waves sweep far up the broad beach.

"The whole world's on fire," exclaimed Robert as he looked back on the blaze that filled all space behind them and sent forth tongues of flame like the flight of blazing arrows. A bunch of cane grass beside them burst into rocket-like sparks with the crackle of a thousand packs of firecrackers, while from a group of cabbage-palms just ahead came the rattling sound of a machine-gun in rapid action, as the palmetto-fans blazed and shriveled in the intense heat.

At times the high grass impeded the progress of the boys, while in the open spaces they sank to their knees in a quivering bog that threatened to engulf them. A burst from the fiery furnace seemed to scorch the clothes on their backs and Robert cried:

"I'm burning to death, Jim, and I can't stand it!"

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"Live or die, we've got to stand it. Here's where you make good as a Scout, Robbie."

As Jim spoke he sank above his waist in the mud and water of one of the alligator holes that abounded in the prairie. He felt the plunging of the great reptile beneath his feet and crawled hastily out of the hole, thankful for his escape from those terrible teeth that could so easily have torn him to pieces. Robert had fallen beside him and as they struggled on, a coating of mud partially protected their blistering backs. Still the heat increased until they seemed to shrivel beneath each fiery blast and the younger one, losing consciousness, sank to the ground. His heat-tortured companion knelt beside him and threw handfuls of water from the marsh upon the boy's face, pleading with him:

"Oh, Robbie, don't give up! Can't you see the river? It's only a few steps away."

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Robert revived and the two went staggering on toward the nearby water. It was a bayou, fifty yards wide, and on its farther bank was a dense hammock of live oak and water oak, cypress and black mangrove. Tall palmettos could be seen in the strangling embrace of the cannibal-fig, or so-called rubber-tree. Twisted vines hung like cordage from the tops of the tallest trees to the slimy depths below. In the gloom of the swamp, black pools of water shivered, as reptiles, big and little, disturbed the depths or glided over the surface.

If only the boys can reach this haven, which the winds cannot disturb and the flames are unlikely to trouble! Their clothing is burning from sparks that cover it. Their eyes are blinded and their lungs choked by the acrid smoke that grows thicker each instant.

Robert has again become unconscious and James drags him on with staggering steps, each of which threatens to be his

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last. That last step is taken as a fire-laden blast strikes him in the back and with flaming hair he falls forward, still, in unconsciousness, clinging to his companion.

The last few steps had been taken in darkness and the boy was all unknowing of the nearness of the haven he was seeking. He was on the brink of the bayou when he took his last step and his forward fall carried him over the brink with Robert. The plunge in the shallow water revived James at once, and Robert, too, soon came to his senses. As they crouched in the water the bank of the bayou protected them from the flame and smoke that streamed over them.

"Trouble has come, Robbie, and we've got to face it. We must cross this bayou in spite of the flame and smoke that'll strike us when we leave the bank. I believe I can swim it and pull you through if you'll lie on your back on the water and try not to struggle."

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"Pull your grandmother! I can swim that little creek with my hands tied. Why, Jimmie, you old raven, you brought this all on by your croaking last night, and I'm glad of it. Now we've got to start out with nothing but the clothes we've got on and I haven't enough of those to be decent. Come on, for I'm off," and Robert, closely followed by his companion, started out to wade the mud and swim the water of the bayou. Sometimes they dipped their heads under water as waves of heat swept down upon them, but the surface was nearly free from smoke and they soon climbed the opposite bank and plunged into the cool depths of the slimy swamp.

As the boys watched the red flames licking up the grass and burning the trees of the prairie where they had slept they began to realize the terrible danger that had passed. With worn bodies and

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exhausted nerves they sat for an hour, seldom speaking, while the fire slackened for want of fuel.

"Bob," said James at last, "there comes the sun and we've got to get busy. I wish I knew what will happen before night."

"I hope we find good water. I could drink a mud puddle dry if only it wasn't salt."

"Forget it if you can. It may be days before we find a drop of drinkable water, and we mustn't lose an hour in starting for it."

"Where shall we go?"

"We might try for the Gulf coast, but there would be almost impassable mangrove-swamps to cross, acres of sharp oyster shells to tramp over, and rivers and sloughs to wallow through."

"That won't do, Jim, for you couldn't walk a rod on oyster shells without your shoes. Why didn't you wear 'em to bed

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as I did? You're so improvident that I sometimes despair of ever making a First Class Scout out of you."

"I'll teach you to be respectful to your superiors when I get around to it, but first we must get out of this scrape."

"Why not go back the way we came, if we can find it?"

"We'd have to wait for the fire to die out, unless we wanted to walk on hot coals. Our canoe is ashes, our stores burned up, and we would have miles of oyster reefs to travel over. There are fifty miles of Big Cypress Swamp to the north of us which we could travel if we were sure of water to drink."

"I move we go where we can find fresh water quickest and that we start now."

"Then we will strike out for the Everglades and our course is as near east as we can make it."

"Won't we find fresh water before we reach the Glades?"

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"We might strike a river flowing from them in a single day."

"Bully! I can do without water for one day."

"Anyhow, Bobbie, we are likely to run across alligator holes, and if we can worry the reptiles out of them we'll have water that isn't salt."

"Jimmie, I can go *two* days without a drink."

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CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

TO this day the boys don't like to think of that morning's tramp. The swamp grew darker and more dismal as they waded and wallowed in its recesses. They crossed over quagmires on slippery poles that often rolled and plunged them headlong. They were scratched by bushes and torn by thorns. James was about to place his bare foot upon a low stump that offered a foothold when he saw that it was already occupied by a cotton-mouth whose ivory-like fangs glistened within jaws that opened five inches. Thereafter as he waded in the ooze of the swamp the boy seemed to feel in every root or twig that his foot touched, the writhing of a deadly reptile.

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They were hungry as they plodded along, yet the thought of food was nauseating because of the thirst that tormented them. The morning passed and noon came, yet worn and sweating from anxiety, hard work and the torture of thirst, the boys stumbled on. Neither had spoken for an hour when Robert turning to his companion, said:

"Jim, what is the eighth law of the Boy Scouts?"

"Nice time to ask that question, isn't it? 'A Scout is cheerful. He never grumbles at hardships.' Wonder if the fellow who invented that law was ever in a hole like this. I'm going to make a bluff at obeying it, though, and you can lambaste me if you catch me grumbling again to-day. If we don't find dry land and I have to sleep up to my neck in mud, I'm going to be cheerful about it."

"Hurrah! Yours for reform,—me too! Now suppose you think of the eleventh

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law—'A Scout is clean and travels with a clean crowd.' I sure hate to part company with you, Jimmie, but I'm breaking that law every minute I stay by you. If only you could see yourself! If you went home like that your folks would call out the hose company to wash you down, before letting you in."

"You had better study the twelfth law, 'A Scout is reverent,' which means that you must be respectful and kotow to me as your superior.'

"I expect to make fun of most things as long as I live and perhaps longer, but if you think I'm not reverently thankful for our escape last night, you've got another guess coming."

"I know that, Robbie. You didn't need to explain."

"Oh, Jim, look away ahead, between those trees. There's something to be thankful for and cheerful about, and maybe a chance for you to get clean so that I can associate with you."

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"I see it. It's dry land and a chance to walk without stepping on snakes."

It proved to be a little oasis in the swamp, of five or six acres only, but the boys rejoiced to feel the firm earth beneath their feet and at once began to look for water that they could drink. They failed to find it but they did better, for they came upon a wild orange tree upon which much of the fruit of the previous season yet hung.

"What did those old gods, that bothered us so at school, mostly live on, Jim?" inquired Robert, as he lay on the ground sucking his sixteenth orange.

"Nectar and ambrosia, usually, though Bacchus is said to have taken something stronger on the side."

"I remember he was the goat, but if nectar had been as good as the juice of these oranges he'd never have wanted anything else."

"Man cannot live by drink alone and we've got to hustle for solid food."

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"That's all arranged for. I've got a cabbage-palmetto in my eye and I'm going to dig out the bud soon as I've drunk five or six dozen more oranges."

"If you drink any more oranges you'll die and you've probably taken enough already to kill you, but how do you expect to cut out that bud without a hatchet?"

"I've got my big knife and—"

"Bully! I hadn't a notion that we saved anything so useful as a knife. You don't happen to have a haversack and a couple of canteens in your pocket?"

"You couldn't expect me to think of everything when you didn't think of anything."

"Never mind. All is forgiven since you brought the knife, which means food and fire as well as clothing and shelter, if we need them. We'll strip a lot of these palmetto-leaves and braid a couple of baskets that will hold enough oranges

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and cabbages to carry us to the Everglades."

"We'll have to get busy if we expect to get off to-morrow morning," said Robert, as he started for the cabbage-palm. The boys took turns cutting away the tough leaves of the palm and both had sore hands by the time they had cut out three buds and when night came the baskets were not half done. They decided to remain where they were for another day and start for the Everglades on the following morning.

The first day's tramp was discouraging, for they struck a marshy meadow, bounded by a mangrove-swamp, which turned them so far south of their course that night found them little nearer the Everglades than when they started.

The tramp had been hard, James was hobbling along on sore feet, and the palmetto-cabbage failed to satisfy their hunger, yet the boys lived up to the law of their order, and their cheerfulness, as-

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sumed at first, soon became so real that even their mishaps became subjects of mirth.

The next morning they rose to a red letter day when everything went well. Their course was open and the tramping so easy that though they had to wade and swim several bayous and streams, they had covered twenty miles by the middle of the afternoon, when they came upon an old Indian camp on the bank of a creek of clear water.

"Here's where I get a wash," exclaimed Robert as he dove from the bank. A moment after coming to the surface he sputtered in excitement:

"It's fresh, Jimmie, it's fresh!" and then the boy drank until his companion called to him:

"Don't drink up the river, Robert. Remember there are others."

The camp was of an Indian boat-builder and from the cypress tree felled beside it a Seminole canoe had been con-

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structed. The five-pointed star of the Seminole camp-fire, consisting of poles radiating from a center, was on the ground ready for rekindling.

"It's up to you, Jim, to rebuild that fire. What's the good of your Scout books and badges if you can't do a little thing like that? All you need is a shoe-lace and some wood—and I'll furnish the shoe-lace. Seton says he gets the first spark in six seconds and a real fire in half a minute."

"I saw him do it once, though he took longer that time, and I believe I can do it, too. I wish I was sure of having something to cook on the fire when we get it."

"I'll tend to that. I hear some young birds squawking out in the brush and I'll have their necks wrung by the time your fire is ready."

"Leave me your knife and a shoe-string and run along, little boy."

The birds that Robert heard were

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young ibis just learning to fly, and they led him a chase up trees, over marshes and through thickets, before he managed to kill three of them with sticks. The chase was a long one and when the boy returned to the camp, James had completed the drill, bow, and socket and was finishing the fire-board out of a piece of cypress from the tree the Indian canoe-builder had felled. It was an exciting moment when he began to work the drill and yet more so a few minutes later when the wood began to smoke but no spark repaid his efforts.

"Let me try," said Robert and when he stopped, quite breathless, he was hot enough to have cooked the birds if the heat could have been utilized. James refashioned the notch in the fire-board several times and was at last rewarded by a glowing spark.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, but his rejoicing was premature for the shredded wood intended for tinder failed to catch

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and the spark quickly died. The boys worked the drill by turns, getting several sparks, but though they tried different kinds of wood fiber and dry pith they failed to get the flame they sought.

"Jimmie," said the younger boy, "we need that fire in our business and I move we get it. I dare you to take turns with me at that drill all this night and all day to-morrow and till the fire comes."

"I'll go you," said the sweating Jim, as he whirled the drill on the smoking wood. The gods hate a quitter and they rewarded the resolution of the boys with a spark of Promethean fire which made to blaze the charred bit of Spanish moss that was being tried as tinder. Soon the Seminole fire was rekindled and the Seminole fuel fed up to it while the boys broiled the birds that half an hour later had been devoured to the last morsel.

"Jim," said Robert that night, as they were lying to leeward of the smoldering fire that the drifting smoke might dis-

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courage the mosquitoes, "we came out to camp for a month. Why shouldn't we stay right here?"

"We couldn't stay as long as that, for it may take us a good while to get home, but I'll be glad enough to try it for a week or two. It's the realist camping I ever heard of. We start with nothing but a pocket-knife and a shoe-string. I don't count our clothes, for they are burned and torn until I could make a more decent suit out of fig leaves—"

"I saw a fig tree," interrupted Robert, "when I was chasing those birds and I'll get some figs in the morning."

"We're solid on the water question," resumed James, "and if we can't get all the food we need we deserve to go hungry. I saw a rabbit while I was making a fire and I'll set a trap for him in the morning, or else make a snare out of a root or vine."

"It isn't customary for sportsmen to snare game," said Robert.

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"It isn't customary for sportsmen to have nothing but a jack-knife to hunt with."

"I'm going to hunt with a bow and arrow in the morning," and the boy dropped asleep to dream of sending cloth-yard shafts through Seminoles clad in coats of mail of the vintage of the Crusades.

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CHAPTER V

LOST ON THE PRAIRIE

"I'LL go whack some birds for breakfast," said Robert to his chum, who was stirring up the fire, "but I'll take a dip in the river first."

He stood on the bank for a moment and then dove into the clear depths of the stream. He was gone so long that James became alarmed and hurried to the brink in time to see Robert come to the surface twenty yards up the creek, clutching a turtle, whose legs waved wildly.

"I wish there was a way to make soup of this," said James, after the reptile had been killed.

"The bottom of the creek is rocky.

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Why can't we heat some stones and boil water in the shell?"

"That rock is coral which would turn to lime when heated and make our soup mostly mortar."

"Then I'll take turtle steak for breakfast," which is what he got.

While James made figure-four traps and set twitch-up snares, using roots made flexible by pounding, Robert fashioned a bow from a small branch of the cypress and fitted to it a tough piece of vine for a string. He made arrows of reeds, weighting them with pieces of coral, tipping them with long thorns, and feathering them from the wings of the birds he had killed.

"Now see me slay that water-turkey," said he, as he raised his weapon. But the arrow never left the bow nor the bird its perch, for the string snapped before the bow was half bent. Roots and vines that seemed unbreakable in

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the hand, snapped like thread beneath the earnest drawing of a bow.

"Lazy folks take the most trouble," said the boy, "and now I'll do what I knew I should have done first." He stripped fine fibers from a nearby palm, and twisted them into heavy threads, from which he braided a bowstring so strong, so flexible, that any subject of the Sultan might have been proud to be strangled with it. So much time was spent getting ready to hunt that the boys would have gone supperless to bed but for a nest of young herons that James came across while setting his snares.

"Jimmie," said Robert, when the day was done and they lay beside the fire, "I've been thinking of what your father said, about its not being hunting to hire a guide to hunt for you. I had a good time on last year's trip, but this is worth a hundred of it. I'm glad of everything that's happened to us, and that everything we had was burned."

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"How about your lion skin?"

"Oh, dear, I forgot that. I am sorry for that."

"You'll be sorry for something else if we don't do better providing than we have done to-day. I'm 'most starved."

"We were only getting ready to-day. I'm going hunting to-morrow, and if I don't bring home something you can eat me."

"I can't go very far, 'count of my feet."

"You can't go at all—with me. Your feet look mighty bad and you ought to rest them. Why not take a lot of this coarse grass, or strips of palmetto, and braid yourself some shoes? Make 'em big, stuff grass in them, and tie 'em on."

"I believe I can do that, Bob, only I can't let you get lost."

"I'll be careful. I don't mean to go far."

James found a rabbit in one of his snares and a possum had been crushed to

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death by the log of a figure-four trap and both the beasts were roasted for breakfast, although a few legs were left over for another meal. Robert started out with his bow, quiver of arrows, and a big palmetto bag hung on his shoulder to carry his game. He walked through several miles of woods and swamp without finding anything to shoot. He came to a meadow dotted with clumps of palmettos and saw several flocks of turkeys but they scarcely let him get within rifle-shot. A fat limpkin lit near him and he so wounded the bird with an arrow that he was able to catch it.

A little later he almost ran over a buck that lay in the grass. If he had had a club to throw at the creature instead of a bow he might have killed it, but the arrow that struck the deer in the ribs didn't feaze it for a second. Robert saw the quarry was wounded and followed it at top speed through all its turns hoping to see it fall.

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"HE CAME TO A MANGROVE THICKET"

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They crossed several little prairies and thickets and bits of swamp before Robert lost sight of the deer, and thereafter he followed its tracks until he had qualified twice over for test four of a Second Class Scout. He lost much time following the trail through a small prairie that had recently been burned over and when he had crossed it he found a labyrinth of tracks and could not tell which to follow. He gave up the chase and started for camp, crossing several little prairies that he thought he recognized.

When he came to a mangrove thicket that he had never before seen, he turned back and found that all the little prairies looked alike, that all had the same little clumps of palms and Spanish bayonet, and that he didn't know one from another, and he had lost all idea of direction. In the excitement of the chase he had given no thought to his course, and camp might lie toward any point of the

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compass. Indeed he didn't know the points of the compass, for it was near midday in summer and the sun was almost vertically above him. He started to back-track himself, but a tract of burnt prairie confused him and in his excitement he began to run.

Then the panic of one who is lost in the woods overtook him. He ran until he was exhausted and breathless, when happily he stumbled and fell to the ground. As he scrambled to his feet a deer sprang from a clump of grass near him and although the arrow he sent after it flew wide of the quarry, it brought the boy to his senses. He was so deeply ashamed of his panic that as he sat down on a fallen tree, he said to himself:

"I'd rather die in the swamp in my senses than go crazy again like that," and when a boy makes that resolve he isn't likely to die in any swamp which men can travel. It was a resolute Robert, quite safe from being again stam-

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peded, who rose from the log and looked coolly around as he reasoned upon his situation. Then walking slowly to where a thin line of bushes indicated the course of a creek, he tasted the water and found it salt.

"That means that I have been traveling west," he soliloquized, "for the fresh water of our camp must have come from the Everglades. My course lies eastward till I find fresh water. Then I'll be safe, for food can always be found. I can eat this limpkin raw if I fail to make a fire. Now for a high tree that I can climb to see what I can see."

There were tall palmettos, but Robert shook his head as he looked at them. He would try them if nothing else could be found, but the long, slim trunks with no branches were constructed for the climbing of cats rather than boys. Over some low-growing mangroves to the south Robert caught sight of the tops of tall trees, other than palmetto. His

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course was devious, for he was turned aside by mangrove thickets, baffled by bayous and delayed by swamps until the day was nearly done, when he reached the trees, which stood in a small hammock. He climbed to the top of a tall mastic tree from which he could see miles in every direction. The setting sun gave him back the points of the compass and all thought of being lost passed from him.

"If only Jim knew I was safe," he said to himself, "I'd be perfectly happy here, but that boy will be worried and I've got to find him. I can't tramp in the dark and I don't see his smoke, but I'll tree him by the light of his camp-fire to-night, for he'll sure have a big one, and then I'll come down on him for breakfast."

As the boy talked to himself he carefully studied the panorama spread out before him. His view to the north was

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bounded by a forest of cypress whose light green tops were interspersed with the darker leaves of the water-oak. To the west and south were areas of mangroves, red and black, interspersed with bits of dry prairie, marshy meadows, bayous, and streams. On the eastern horizon lay the placid waters of the shallow sea called the Everglades, and between it and Robert were little forests of trees of many kinds, with meadows, rivers, and little lakes. The boy could not identify the stream of their camp and no smoke could he see, but he was cheerful as he climbed down the tall tree, so sure was he of finding his companion in the morning. When half way down the tree Robert exclaimed:

"I'll be jiggered if there isn't a cocoa-palm, just as I was mighty thirsty, too. Curious how trees seem to know and bring me drinks when I need 'em. Wonder if the Dryads tell them. The other

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day it was a sour orange tree. This time it's the milk in the cocoanut that does the business."

He gathered nuts while yet it was light and cutting holes in the eyes drank the milk, after which he broke the nuts and feasted on their creamy flesh. When the stars came out he again climbed the tall mastic tree and shouted with joy when he saw the flame and smoke of a distant camp-fire. From time to time the flame increased and as fresh columns of sparks appeared, Robert nodded his head and sagely remarked:

"I've hopes of that boy. With a little training he'll make a good Scout." Then he broke a small branch till it pointed at the flame and returned to the foot of the tree, to lie down but not to sleep. It was his first night alone in the wild, and the forest never sleeps. Its voices came to him from every side, from the bellowing of a distant alligator, to the leaf by his ear quivering beneath the

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weight of an insect, or the grass that rustled to the sinuous movement of a snake, harmless or otherwise; from the far-away cry of a panther to the long-drawn squeak of a frog in a nearby swamp as he slowly sank to his grave between the venomous jaws of a moccasin; and from the whistling wings overhead of night-flying birds to the heavy step and breaking branches that told of the passing of some great beast.

The tenth law of the Boy Scouts commands the Scout to be brave and Robert was that all right, for even though his heart beat fast and his hands trembled in the presence of unknown peril, there was no danger that he would not have faced with as stout a heart as occasion called for. Often as he was beginning to doze, the thought of the anxiety that he knew was keeping Jim awake drove every thought of sleep from his mind.

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CHAPTER VI

HOUSE-BUILDING

COME what may,
Time and the hour run through the roughest day—"

and the long night ended for both the boys, while Robert rose at dawn awake to the fact that the hobgoblins of the night were creations of his too vivid fancy.

"Next time I act like a baby in the dark I'll hire somebody to kick me," said the boy to himself as he climbed the mastic tree and sighting along the broken branch located the smoke of the camp and the stream that flowed past it. Then, finding a tree that was in line with the camp, he descended to the ground and prepared for his journey. He

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gathered yards of the coarse brown cloth that grows about the trunk of the cocoa-palm and filled his haversack with its fruit, saying:

"Milk and meat,
To drink and eat,
Canteens and clothing, too."

He tramped from the mastic tree to the one selected as in line with the camp and then sighting back and forth chose another tree for his guidance. When turned from his course by thicket or swamp he walked at right angles to it, counting his steps and retracing them as opportunity offered. He had tramped for two hours and was looking back to correct his course when a shout came to his ears:

"Hurrah and Hurrah! Oh, Bobbie boy, but it's good to see you! Did you get lost and how did you find your way back so straight?"

"Oh, no, I didn't get lost, Jimmie; I've

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only been foraging and kinder surveyin' the country a little, but I've got an appetite and a thirst, so please put this bird on the coals while I drink up the river."

The boys talked nineteen to the dozen as they ate their breakfast, and Robert learned something of the hardships endured by his companion, of the waiting, waiting, always anxiously waiting as he fed the fire, listening and shouting by turns, as he feared for his friend's safety and hungered for a sight of his face.

"I meant to be careful, Jimmie, I really tried," said Robert remorsefully, "but when I got after that deer I lost all the sense I had and when I found I was lost I started to run and if I hadn't stumbled into the mud I'd have been running yet. I'm sorry, Jimmie."

"It's all right now, Bob, and hereafter we'll keep together. My feet are a lot

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better though I didn't take time to finish those shoes."

"We'll tend to that now, soon as we lay in some grub. We'll go into the tailoring business, for I've got cloth enough to set up a shop."

"Grub is all right. I haven't shown you the larder. We've got two rabbits, a turtle, and I know where to pick up birds any minute I want 'em. And oh, I found a nest of land turtle eggs, hard shell and good as pigeons' eggs."

"We must smoke a lot of turtle- and bird-flesh ready for our journey home. I'll make water-bottles out of our cocoanuts that will help a little but I reckon we'll be good and thirsty before we get there. I wish we had a canoe. Don't you think we could make a dug-out by hollowing a log with fire?"

"It would be a big job and we can put in our time to better advantage. I've got an idea."

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"The idea that you've got an idea, Jimmie, gives me heart failure, but don't let it go."

"I propose," continued James, ignoring Robert's impertinence, "that when we leave here we strike out for a Seminole camp. There are some near the edge of the Everglades, in the Big Cypress Swamp. We can keep on the border of the Glades till we strike an Indian trail and then follow that to their camp."

"Sometimes you show glimmerings of intelligence, Jimmie. We'll have to swim some, wade and wallow a lot, but we'll never be thirsty, though it's likely we'll drown. Maybe they won't scalp us and if they do we will have visited Indian camps that no other white folks have seen. But suppose we pull through alive, do you mean to join the tribe? You wouldn't have to change your costume much. Your legs are as bare and as brown as a Seminole's now."

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"We could spend a few days at their camp and then hire or buy a canoe and find our way home through one of the rivers near here or else by way of Okeechobee, through the drainage canal, and down the Caloosahatchee."

"S'pose the Indians will trust you for the price of a boat?"

"Sure! The Seminoles have been cheated out of their eye teeth but they are naturally so honest that they find it hard to distrust others."

"Jimmie, look there! See the black clouds and the big storm coming!"

"Coming? It's here, and we must save that fire."

For a few minutes the boys gathered palmetto leaves and sticks, spread them over the glowing coals as the storm burst upon them, twisting small trees, breaking branches from big ones, and sending masses of water against them with almost irresistible force. The boys lay between the logs, that in Seminole fash-

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ion radiated from the fire they fed, and covered the burning ends with palmetto leaves to divert the deluge. In ten minutes the storm had passed and a cloudless sky looked innocently incapable of the mischief it had done.

"We've lost our beautiful fire," said James, sadly, "and all our fire-machinery is soaked."

"While there is smoke there is hope," said Robert, as kneeling in a puddle among the ashes, he blew vigorously at the charred end of one of the fire-logs. A spark that appeared soon became a glowing coal which, when fed by splinters cut from the log, burst into flame.

"Good for you, Robbie. I'll see that this trouble doesn't happen again. I'm going to build a shack. It will keep our fire alive, anyhow."

"While you're doing that I'll try tailoring and make you a shirt and a pair of trunks, for you look shameful, Jimmie. Your old burnt uniform isn't as

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big as the holes in it. What do you suppose the Minnehaha of the Seminoles will say to you if she sees you looking like that?"

"Here, you ninth part of a man," said James a little later, "come here and make yourself useful. Bring your knife and climb this sapling."

"What do you want?"

"Want ten rafters each eight feet long by one and one-half inches in diameter."

Robert climbed saplings till they bent nearly to the ground while James drew the point of the knife across the strained fibers of the wood and the little trees were felled in a small fraction of the time it would have taken to whittle them down. The young Scout made fire do the work of an axe. He burned seven feet from the small end of one of the fire-logs, giving him a ridgepole which he placed upon branches growing five feet from the ground on two trees that were six feet apart. He burned the small

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trees he had felled into rafter-lengths, and rounded and hardened the ends in the fire. He placed five rafters each side of the ridgepole, ramming the pointed ends six inches in the ground and letting the others project the same distance beyond the ridgepole. Any Boy Scout can figure that the ground enclosed was almost precisely six feet by ten.

"Now run back to your tailoring, Robbie, I will do the rest myself," and James cut twenty-four sticks, each seven feet long by about an inch in diameter, which he wove in at right angles to the rafters and six inches apart. The roof of the shack now looked like coarse basket work and into this fabric the boy wove the long stems of palmetto leaves until a row of these fans extended like a course of shingles across the bottom of the roof. Upon these another row of fans was laid, leaving six inches to the weather, as a builder would say, until

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the whole building was neatly thatched. One-half of each end of the shack, from tree to rafters, was wattled with inch sticks and filled with a tight weave of tough cane grass running vertically and capable of shedding the water of even a tropical rainstorm. The other half of the two ends was left open to serve as doors and windows and Robert proposed to weave palmetto mats at his earliest leisure to hang over the openings when storm-doors were needed. With ropes braided from long, tough grass each rafter was lashed to the ridgepole and every cross-stick tied as needed, until the boys felt that the storm that destroyed it would uproot every tree about them. With a fire-sharpened stick for a pick and a turtle-shell for a shovel the boys graded the ground about their building till it was safe from being flooded from below.

"It's the bumcombist camp I ever saw," exclaimed Robert, "and I wish it

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would rain like smoke, to try it. From start to finish it was built in less than three days, too."

"But they were not eight hour days, Bob. Except when we were eating we didn't miss a minute of daylight and we braided those ropes by firelight."

"Speaking of eating, Jim, the cupboard is bare and you had better get after your traps, while I go hunting."

"We'll go hunting together, this time, Bobbie. My feet are 'most well, and I won't have to wear these baskets on them any longer."

"I'll help you with your traps in the morning and we'll make a day of it. I saw a hammock on my way home the other day that ought to be looked into."

The old traps and snares were set and new ones made in the early morning and the Boy Scouts started out care free on a happy holiday. They looked often at the sun and kept in mind every change

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of course so that there was no moment of the day when they could not have pointed toward their home on the bank of the fresh water river. Soon after starting they came upon a doe with a well-grown fawn, which stared at them with wide-open eyes from a distance of thirty yards.

"You needn't be troubled," said Robert to the deer, "for I'm not going to shoot another of your family till I'm starving, myself. I wish Jim had his camera here though, you beauties."

The doe must have understood, for she walked quietly away, followed by her fawn, and the fact that she told the rest of her tribe was quite evident to the boys, since of many deer seen by them that day not one seemed hurried or anxious. A 'possum who presumed upon the era of good feeling, which seemed to him to have set in, got knocked in the head as he stepped out of the hollow log where

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he lived. Later in the day he had to be killed again, when, thinking himself unobserved, he came to life and was treacherously crawling away.

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CHAPTER VII

A FIGHT WITH AN ALLIGATOR

"WHAT makes you kind to deer and cruel to that little pig, Robbie?"

"I remember that a legion of devils once entered into swine and I never heard of their coming out, so I swat anything that looks like a pig, on principle!"

Robert's skill with the bow and arrow increased hourly and soon his haversack was full of fat young ibis, which James said had all been shot first and run down afterward. While hunting birds they came to a little rookery, well hidden in the woods, containing the nests of half a dozen of the fast-disappearing snowy heron. They crept quietly away with-

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out disturbing the birds and James lamented the loss of his camera, for the chance to photograph one of these beautiful creatures happens about once in a blue moon.

"What's that?" exclaimed Robert as the boys stepped out of a thicket upon a bit of prairie across which a big reptile was crawling.

"It's only an alligator. We don't need him in our business."

"You bet we do. Why, Jimmie, there is a pair of boots for you in his hide and he's carrying them off. Come on!" and Robert went racing across the field in chase of the reptile, which scrambled away at a wonderful gait considering the shortness of his legs. When the boy overtook the creature there was no time to lose, for the deep pool in the prairie where the alligator lived was within three yards. Robert threw himself upon the saurian and seizing its serrated tail with both hands clung on

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like grim death. The boy was thrown back and forth and rolled over on the turf while the great jaws of the monster gnashed their gleaming ivory-like teeth within a few inches of his face. Whack! went the club of James upon the head of the 'gator and in the mix-up that followed the boy rained blows upon head and body of the armor-clad brute which faced him with open mouth, waiting for the chance to bite off an arm or leg. In five minutes James was panting with fatigue from his furious efforts and Robert was bruised and bleeding, while the reptile banged the latter with his tail and faced the former with undiminished vigor.

"Can you hang on for a minute, Bob?"

"Don't worry about me. I can manage the tail, but what's to be done with the other end of the beast?"

"Watch out and see me tackle it." Then James thrust the end of his club

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within the open jaws, which closed upon it, and throwing himself upon the head of the alligator placed his thumbs over the nostrils of the reptile in the upper jaw, and clutched his fingers in the soft skin beneath the point of the lower jaw.

"We've got him," he shouted. "He can't open his mouth to bite, so let's turn him on his back."

In a few minutes this was accomplished, although in doing it Robert grabbed the hind legs of the creature, which promptly knocked him endwise with its tail. But the reptile was helpless on its back with James kneeling on its head.

"Bring your knife, Bob, and finish him."

"The best time to skin an animal is soon after he is killed," said James, "so let's get busy."

"How long does an alligator live after he is dead?" inquired Robert as he picked himself up after being knocked

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over by the tail of the defunct animal while he was skinning it.

"Reptiles never die until after the sun has set, and we can't wait for that unless we want to walk home in the dark."

It was dark when the young Boy Scouts reached their camp, laden with the hide of the alligator they had killed, two rounds of white flesh which they had carved from the tail of the reptile, and the possum and birds provided for the larder. They will never forget the repast that followed their return. The flesh of the 'possum was as succulent as the sucking pig which Charles Lamb's Chinaman roasted in the coals of his blazing home and the broiled young birds were tender as the heart of a maiden. The alligator-steak was unlike the fish or meat of the markets, though it had some of the qualities of both, and in taste was not unlike the famed green turtle. Each of the boys devoured several pounds, despite its faint flavor of

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musk. They had bread from a cabbage-palm, mastic berries and figs for dessert, and wound up their repast with the milk and custard of their last cocoanut. When both were as stuffed as a Christmas goose they built up a big fire and by its light scraped with shells their alligator hide, afterwards hanging it in the smoke of the fire.

"Bob," said James, when the work was done, "did you say there was a salt water stream near that mastic tree where you camped the night you were lost?"

"You mean the night the camp was lost, Jimmie. I knew where I was all the time. The water was salt and I wish I had some of it now."

"Me, too. I'd have given half of that lovely dinner for three pinches of salt to go with the other half. I move we start to-morrow at sun-up for that salt river and fill all the cocoanuts we can carry with the water. We can evaporate it in

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these shallow turtle shells in the sun or by the fire and get another taste of the thing that beats any kind of candy out of sight."

"I'll be with you, Jimmie. I don't wonder that the Abyssinians used it as money nor that extra good people are called the salt of the earth," saying which he dropped off to sleep.

The boys visited the mastic tree where Robert had camped and the cocoa-palm near it. They made slings for the empty shells which were then filled with salt water and strung on poles to carry to their camp. They counted on getting several ounces of salt but they never knew how well they succeeded, for they couldn't wait till all the water had evaporated but dipped their food in the saline solution whenever they wanted salt.

"Jimmie, you're limping," said Robert the next morning, "and I don't stir from this camp till I've made you a

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pair of alligator moccasins that will turn the fangs of the moccasins that bite and shed cactus thorns as if they were drops of dew."

"Good for you, Bob, and while you are making them I'll braid you a shirt from this tough cane grass that will stick like that of Nessus, and turn the point of a lance or an arrow like the coat of mail of a crusader."

Robert traced the shape of his companion's soles on the belly of the alligator-hide, where the squares are largest and the skin thickest. Having cut these out he pieced the uppers from the soft small-patterned skin of the throat and inside of the legs. He cut thongs of leather from the hide and using the awl in his knife sewed the pieces of each upper together and made them fast to their soles. He threaded tie-strings of alligator-hide in the uppers and it was a finished product that he held out for his companion's inspection.

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"Bob," said James, after he had tried them on, "these are the best-fitting and beautifulest moccasins I ever saw. You know the final test of a good Scout is doing good to somebody every day. Now these moccasins will save me from cuts and bruises for many a day to come, so you have qualified way ahead."

"But, Jimmie, a Scout mustn't take pay for service and that talk is the biggest kind of pay, so I guess I'd better take the things back."

"Guess again, Bob."

" 'Who dares this pair of boots displace,
Must meet Bombastes face to face,' "

quoted Robert.

"I'd like to have you try out those boots, Jim. Suppose we explore some, to-morrow. It's getting so civilized here that there's nothing doing."

"That suits me. We'll broil enough birds and turtle—if we can catch them—for a two days' trip up the river and

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back. We will have fresh water all the way, plenty to eat, and it will be a regular picnic."

"The whole business is a picnic, Jim, and I hate to think that it's got to end."

"How about your mother and the rest of the family, Bob?"

"Oh, I want them here, too."

Early the next morning the boys, with a goodly store of provisions, started up the river. Robert was armed with bow and arrows while James carried a formidable club. They moved slowly and silently as if they were following the trail of some shy creature of the wilderness. Soon they had their reward, for Robert, parting the thick bushes on the bank of the stream, motioned to James, who was behind him. In a deep pool beneath the opposite bank a family of otters were disporting. Their heads were constantly appearing upon the surface and then bobbing beneath it.

"They are playing tag," whispered

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Robert, as one otter raced up the steep bank in pursuit of another, closely following his companion as he glided swiftly down a well-worn toboggan-slide. The boys watched the coasting game of the otter family for some minutes, freely whispering their comments, until an old otter, seeing, hearing, or smelling danger, quickly turned his head toward them and with a cry of warning to his family plunged beneath the surface of the stream and was not again seen. A moment later the last of the little family disappeared. Robert drew a long breath as he said:

"How could anybody who saw that kill one of those cunning creatures?"

"You are getting pretty skilful with your bow, Bob, and you could have got one of those otters. It would make a pretty tippet for your mother and she would be proud of it. Didn't you think of that?"

"No, I didn't, and Mother wouldn't

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wear the skin if I told her how prettily its owner played with his young ones, just as if they had all been humans. She'd be more likely to cry over it."

"I feel a little that way myself, but how about those rabbits we trapped? I have saved their skins to trim the shirt I am braiding for you. The sharp edges of the grass about the neck will probably saw your head off if you object to wearing rabbit-skin."

"That's different. We killed the rabbits and the birds just as we would have killed chickens or sheep, because we were hungry and they were intended for food."

"But if the rabbits were to swim, dive, play tag and slide down hill, you wouldn't kill them?"

"That isn't what I mean. You feel some things that you can't explain. I am sure I have the right to kill rabbits and birds when I really need food, but I

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believe it is wrong to kill any creature for fun. I think it's wicked for hunters to kill egrets just when they are raising their broods and ten times as wicked for women to buy the plumes of the murdered mother birds."

"Is it wicked for women to wear furs —otter, for instance?"

"Oh, no, and I don't think it's wicked to shoot them or kill them in dead falls or any way that doesn't torture them as steel traps do. Otters eat such a lot of fish that they ought to be kept down, only my feelings won't let me help."

"Bob, your feelings are better than most laws."

As the boys talked they were walking slowly up the bank of the river and had just stepped on a little meadow of waist-high grass, when from somewhere near their feet came a dreaded and dreadful sound the meaning of which they didn't need to ask, though they had never heard

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it before. It was like the rattling of dried peas in a gourd and was the warning the deadly diamond-back gives before striking the fatal blow. At first the boys stood paralyzed, unable to see their enemy and not knowing which way to jump.

Then a waving blade of grass told them where to look and they saw the swaying head with its wide open jaws, erected fangs, and vibrating forked tongue thrown back for a strike. Robert's blow with his bow was a failure and James swung his club in vain but the snake didn't miss and the gleaming fangs, whiter than ivory and sharper than a needle, driven by the powerful muscles of the monster, sank into James' ankle.

Before the reptile could raise its head Robert was upon it clutching its neck with a strangling hold, while shouting to his companion:

"Pound his head with your club,

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Jimmie! Pound him to death, quick, quick, quick! Here, grab him by the neck while I fix the bite. Oh, hurry, Jimmie, hurry!''

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CHAPTER VIII

THE EVERGLADES

AS James grabbed the half dead reptile by the neck with one hand and with shortened club hammered its head, Robert seized his companion's ankle and tearing the moccasin from his foot placed his lips around a tiny puncture from which a drop of blood was oozing. He sucked and sucked, sucked and spat, until James said:

"That's enough, Bob, you've sucked out whatever poison there was, and there's more of it in you than in me, now."

But Robert continued to suck without ceasing until his cheeks were aching and James' ankle was sore, when stopping for a moment, he exclaimed:

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"You know, Jim, that I could swallow that poison without any danger, but just a little drop of it in your blood—oh, I can't bear to think of it, even."

"Bob, boy, just look at this!" half shouted James, who, having pounded the head of the snake to a pulp, was examining the moccasin that Robert had torn from his foot. "See where the fangs struck the alligator hide! They just straddled this soft crease and both landed in good tough leather plates. Why, one hardly got through at all, and the other didn't get far. They must have been wiped clean of venom, for there's about a spoonful of it smeared on the outside of the leather. It's all right now, but just think where those fangs would have gone if it hadn't been for the moccasin. The stroke of the snake felt like the blow of a hammer. So, Rob, either your sucking out the poison, or else the moccasin that you made, saved my life."

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"Jimmie, as Job said to his wife, 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh,' for you know that if I hadn't made the moccasins you wouldn't have been here, so what I did risked your life instead of saving it."

"Of course, it is the intention that counts, and if you intended to risk my life instead of saving it when you sucked the poison from the wound, I'll take back what I said."

"I can't joke about it, yet, Jim, for I haven't got over the horror of the thing. I'm going to chuck that hideous carcass into the river, where I hope a shark will get it."

"No, you don't! I've a better use than that for it. I'll make the skin into a sash to tie round my waist over the shirt I'm going to braid for myself. Won't we be a credit to the Boy Scouts when we sail into Myers in Seminole costume made by ourselves?"

"We'll land in the calaboose if we

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wear Seminole pants," was Robert's reply.

James cut off his enemy's head with its poison-sacs and terrible fangs and threw it into the river before skinning the reptile. The rest of their tramp that day was a silent one, for the shadow of the near tragedy of the morning was over both the boys. They camped early that night, beneath the wide-spreading branches of a gnarly live-oak, from which they pulled long streamers of Spanish moss for their bed. The excitement of the day had tired the boys so that they slept the sleep of the just and it was after sun-up when a burst of melody from a nearby tree awakened them. It came from a gorgeously garbed cardinal, the red bird of the South, which was near to splitting its throat in the ecstasy of its effort. Hardly had the song ended when it was renewed from the tree which sheltered the boys.

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As the liquid notes filled the air, Robert whispered to his chum.

"It must be the cardinal's mate answering his love song."

But the cardinal they saw flew away and the one over their heads ceased to sing. While peering through the branches for a sight of the singer there came to them the shrill, rattling cry of the kingfisher, followed in quick succession by the cawing of a crow, the 'Bob White' of a quail, the hooting of an owl, and the ringing repetition of the chuck-will's-widow, the whip-poor-will of the South.

"There must be an aviary in this tree," said Robert.

"There's your aviary and it is a mocking bird," was the reply, as a grayish little bird hopped down to a branch just over their heads and after giving an exact imitation of the croaking of a frog, cooed over them like a turtle dove.

The boys had reached the source of the

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river they were following and opposite them lay the flooded meadows that fed it. From the bank beside them a slim palmetto held its broad top eighty feet in the air while upthrust from the water before them a custard apple, with a trunk four times larger than the palm's, rose to less than a fourth of its height. The shallow waters were dotted with tiny keys of fragrant myrtle and sweet bay, banked with masses of cocoa-plums. The trees in the hammock behind them were brilliant with orchids and fragrant with flowering vines, while masses of blossoming bayonet plants, night-blooming cereus, and other flowering members of the cactus family, adorned the land. Birds of many kinds were nesting in the trees, wading in the submerged meadows, swimming in the open water, or soaring high in the air. A fork-tailed kite sweeping in graceful curves, seeking its food among the trees upon which it seemed never to alight,

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swooped down for a near view of the boys. For an instant it hung suspended in the air before their faces, slightly swaying as with flexible wing tips it preserved its poise, until, satisfied with its scrutiny, it darted away, sweeping on and up in a sinuous glide far removed from the beating of wings. The boys stood motionless till the kite was out of sight, when the impressionable Robert exclaimed:

"That bird was as beautiful as an angel and this place is pretty as the Garden of Eden."

"Then it must have been the serpent that we killed yesterday and there's the apple tree that made trouble in the family. I'm going to try one now," and James waded out to the curious custard apple tree and gathered a handful of its fruit. He made a wry face as he bit into a luscious looking apple and said:

"Grandmother Eve must have liked the taste of turpentine. It was sure a

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lemon for us that she got, and by the same token it's the top of a lemon that's forninst us, just over that bit of tall grass."

It was a lemon tree, as James supposed, and beside it were others, as well as a group of lime trees laden with fruit. Just beyond was a clump of sugar cane with stalks a dozen feet long.

"Your Garden of Eden was an Indian camp, Bob, for here are the marks of a Seminole fire, which took a better hatchet to make than Adam is supposed to have possessed."

"I don't care whose garden it is. I have been spoiling for something sweet as sugar and something sour as lemon and now I've got both. I mean to eat a peck of limes and chew up a rod of sugar cane before I move from this place."

"Me, too, and we'll eat them with our birds for breakfast. Maybe the lime juice will take the place of salt."

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As the boys dawdled over their breakfast, listening to the songs of birds and gazing out upon a sheet of shallow water, green with lily pads and white with acres of pure pond-lilies, a tiny rabbit crept out from a thicket almost within reach of their hands. Unlike its little brown brothers of the country the creature was nearly black, and its sensitive nostrils quivered as it looked up into eyes that returned kindly glances. As the pretty creature wandered away James whispered:

"That's an Everglade rabbit, Bob, I'm 'most sure. They are very, very rare and somebody told me they were only found on one key in the Glades."

The rabbit came back and rambled around until finally it sniffed at James' new moccasins. Then starting back it stood with uplifted head for a moment before darting into the shrubbery.

"It was the smell of the alligator hide that frightened him, Jim."

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"I don't think so, for he looked over toward those lily-pads as if he heard, or saw something—and so do I, Bobbie. See that big alligator swimming from behind—No, no, it's a Seminole canoe and there are two Indians poling it! They are coming this way and here is our chance to get home if we want to,—which we don't."

"You bet we don't! We'll find our own way to the Indian camps when we are ready to go there and you can tell 'em so."

"But they don't mean to stop for they are going by. They can't see us."

"Can't see your grandmother. They see you too much, Jimmie, for your clothes aren't decent and the Indians are modest. You will have to get a new shirt before you will have a chance to look at your Laughing Water sweetheart."

"I'm glad they've gone, anyhow, for I did want to finish those shirts and

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weave a curtain for a door to our camp. We might as well be moving, and from the way this channel swings around to the west we will save time by swimming it."

They crossed the stream without wetting their food, which they carried above their heads as they swam, and soon were wading in knee-deep water beyond some low trees that had shut out their view.

"The Everglades!" they shouted together as they saw, extending to the horizon and including an arc of a hundred and fifty degrees, the beautiful submerged plain, with its broad, grassy areas, acres of flowers, winding streams of crystal water flowing over beds of white coral, the whole expanse dotted with tiny keys, and all bathed in brilliant sunshine.

"Jimmie, don't you hate to have books lie? They taught us that the Everglades was a dismal swamp, when it is as beautiful as a dream," and the sentimental Robert proceeded to quote:

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" 'Know ye the land where the cypress and
myrtle—'

(That's this, Jim.)

" 'Are emblems of deeds that are done in their
clime,
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the
turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime?' "

"Oh, come off, Bob, nothing is going to 'madden to crime,' unless you keep on spouting poetry. It is time to light out for home and get busy with those shirts and pants."

"Seminoles don't wear pants."

"Then we will be Scotch and wear kilts like Carnegie."

"I want to take a look at that mound before we go back. I thought I saw something alive on it, and there comes a big alligator out of it. See him tear through the grass and water! Let's have a look at his house."

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CHAPTER IX

AN EMERGENCY RATION

THE Boy Scouts waded out in the Everglades for half a mile without further adventure and were returning when a diedipper flew out of a bunch of thick grass near them.

"Look here, Bob," said James, who was walking in advance, "and see the cunningest nest that was ever built. It is floating on the water and fastened to blades of grass. There are six eggs in it."

"Lucky for the mother bird that we didn't find it a few days ago. Let's move on out of temptation."

They swam the stream and followed their own trail back till they reached the meadow where they had killed the rattle-

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snake. Robert was marching gaily along when James called to him:

"Do be careful, the rattler that bit me may have had a mate."

"Don't worry, Jim, the lightning never strikes twice in a place and I—"

He never finished the sentence, for once again came the dreadful sound from an angry diamond-back, the *crotalus adamanteus* of the scientist, and Robert sprang back from the waving head with its wide open jaws.

"Look out!" shouted James and Robert calmly replied:

"The danger is over for I am prepared," and the boy, standing out of reach of the snake, shook his bow of tough cypress before the eyes of the reptile. Again and again the maddened creature struck the bow blows that jarred its head and threatened to break its fangs. After each blow the snake recovered its position, with its coil perfect and its head high and threatening as

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ever. Then came Robert's turn, and though his first blow was dodged he was instantly on guard, and a quick second blow striking the neck brought the rattler's head to the ground. But the neck was not broken and the head was slowly uplifted to meet a fierce blow that would alone have been fatal, though a dozen others were added for good measure.

"I'm glad that scrimmage is over, Bob, for I was worried to death while the fight was on. You ought to wear the trophy you have won."

"I mean to do it, and we'll found a Rattlesnake Order of Boy Scouts. We'll turn the tenderfeet loose in this meadow and if that doesn't teach them to 'be prepared' the snakes can have them, for their cases will be hopeless."

"Do you s'pose that if we ate the flesh of your victim it would give us the wisdom of the serpent?"

"If it would you oughtn't to miss your only chance, and I dare you to try it."

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"If only it wasn't a reptile."

"Why, Jim, you ungrateful thing, to forget the turtle that gave us our first square meal, and the alligator that filled our tummies for days. And, Jim, you like fowls which eat worms and maggots and worse, while this cleanly king of snakes—*chinte chobee,* the Seminoles call him—seldom swallows anything less delicate than a frog, the water chicken of the French."

"You've given your snake such a clean bill of health that I will join you in eating a chunk of him. Then if we only manage to live through it we may get credit for enlarging the Boy Scout bill of fare."

There were coals in the ashes of the camp-fire which the young Scouts had left the morning before, and soon after their return each held a palmetto plate upon which was a goodly portion of the white meat of the enemy whose flesh they were pledged to eat.

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"How does it go, Bob?" asked his companion.

"It would go first-rate if I could stop thinking of the horrid sight of those poisonous fangs and that serpent tongue. It's as delicate as chicken and the best food we've tasted on the trip only—"

"Only what?"

"I'll go hungry before I eat it again."

"What shall we say about it to the Scouts?"

"Report to the council that *crotalus adamenteus* is excellent food—as an emergency ration."

"We may need an emergency ration for breakfast. There is nothing in the larder but limes and sugar cane. I'll set the traps and snares to-night and we may have a rabbit or two by morning."

That evening they planned the work of the morrow. James was to finish the shirt he was at work on and start in on another, while Robert proposed to set up a Boy Scout loom for the weaving of a

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curtain as a door to their camp. But things don't always pan out as they're planned. James returned from his traps in the morning with only a tree-rat to show, though a bear had walked over and sprung one of his traps and he had met a doe with her fawn who looked calmly at him from a distance of a dozen steps. Robert returned from an hour's hunt, empty-handed but keen for his breakfast. When he found there was none he exclaimed:

"Well this is a sure enough hoodoo. It must be Friday the thirteenth. It's really a disgrace, Jim. Here we are in a land of plenty, fish, flesh, and fowl all around us, with fruit and vegetables to burn, and about to die of starvation."

"Yes, Bob, and half an hour after you have died of starvation you will still be talking about it. Now it's up to us to do something. We can dig out a palmetto bud in half an hour and have a cabbage breakfast or we can do without

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breakfast and fill up on a three course dinner and dessert."

"Where will you get it?"

"I know where to find fish and figs and I look to you for birds and a roast."

"Fish, Gee! How you goin' to catch it? I reckon I can make good. I'm pretty sure of the birds and I saw a polecat this morning."

"That isn't so bad as you think. I know fellows that have eaten them and say they are good. Now leave me your knife, for I want to make a fish spear, and then run along, little boy, but don't get lost."

"Who is talking now? Luckily the fish don't mind it or we'd be out one course."

James made a spear of a straight shaft of wood hardened in the fire, sharpened and barbed with needle-like thorns. A quarter of a mile down the stream, where a little creek entered it, he found a pool abounding in bream, big-mouthed bass—

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called, by the Crackers, fresh-water trout,—and other varieties of fish. James soon had a fat bass wriggling on his spear and as others of the family fled up the little creek he followed them until he had three more in his basket and his spear was worn out. As he started for camp he saw a hole in a big rotten log to which a faint trail seemed to lead. He explored it with his spear which encountered something soft and yielding.

"Wonder what's in there," said the boy to himself. "The hole isn't big enough for a bear or a panther and I'm glad of it. Hope it isn't a snake, for I've had enough of them. Guess it must be an otter, for they live in hollow logs, but they bite like bulldogs, so I have got to watch out." James carried a club like a policeman's night stick swung from his neck by a thong and he laid this beside him as he punched away at the unknown. Then he began to break away the rotten edges of the hole, tear-

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ing with his hands and hammering with his club. Frequently he stopped to rest and once while doing so saw something that allayed all apprehension. It was the rat-like tail of an opossum. James seized the tail and pulled, while the 'possum held on with his claws, but the boy won out in the end and a ten-pound roast was secured, for the 'possum was a big one. He had hardly reached camp with his trophies when Robert came in laden like a pedler. He was draped with curlews, Indian hens, and a heron, while in his arms he carried a big gopher tortoise.

"I've got the birds and something to roast, Jim, though it's a 'possum I expected to get."

"That's all right, the 'possum is here."

"Gee but he's a buster! How did you get him?"

"Dug him out of his hole, and I was scared every minute for fear it was a snake."

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"I grabbed my gopher just before he reached his hole. I wouldn't have tried digging him out. Too many people have been killed while doing it. I believe rattlesnakes use gophers as bait to bring folks to their dens. But Jimmie, kindly tell me if my eyes deceive me, or is that a mess of fish that is hanging by the camp?"

"It's fish, all right, and trouble enough I had getting them. I missed or gashed three for every one I bagged. A wooden spear is no good, but if I had a gill net as big as a tablecloth I could stretch it across a little creek and run a bushel of fish into it any minute."

"Count us fish-eaters, Jim, from this hour and rely on me for a palm-fiber, two-inch mesh, buncombe net. I'll have it done before you can finish those shirts. But let's get busy about dinner. I am an aching, hollow void, liable to collapse any instant."

"It's going to be a feast of many

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courses. Have you any choice as to their order?"

"No, you fix that, only don't lose any time. I'm too hungry to think. I want to eat."

"If I am to be chef, things must be done in order. So you can take your knife and dig the bud out of that young palmetto yonder while I gather fruit from some trees I wot of. If you finish first you may butcher your gopher and make a broiler of green sticks."

When James returned the work had been done, and covering the broiler with thin slices of tortoise flesh he placed it over the fire, which he fed with green twigs.

"Now, Bob, by the time you have washed your hands and set the table, the first course will be ready."

"Don't I have the bill of fare before I begin to eat, so I'll know what to leave out?"

"Sure. The first course will be turtle

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soup, minus the soup. It is made as you see by broiling and smoking at one operation thin slices of gopher tortoise. It is intended as an appetizer.

"Second course: fish; big-mouthed bass, Everglade fashion, wrapped in large leaves and baked in the ashes. To be served with sliced limes.

"Third course: vegetables; palmetto cabbage *à la* Cracker.

"Fourth course: game; Indian hen, or limpkin, Seminole style.

"Fifth course: roast; 'possum *à la* nigger.

"Dessert: cocoa palm custard, if there are any young cocoanuts left, figs and mastic berries.

"Liqueur: crême de lime with sugar cane."

The first course disappeared quickly, for the chef refused to permit a second helping, as unfair to the courses that were to follow. After the bass had been swaddled in leaves, packed away in hot

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ashes and live coals heaped over it, James said to his hungry chum:

"You have some time to wait for the second course and you'll feel better to be at work, so just fix a tripod high over the fire with a thong hanging down from the top. We will tie this to the 'possum's tail, give the beast an occasional twirl, and watch him roast. I'll have the critter skinned and dressed by the time you are ready for him."

When the roast was under way James drew a fat limpkin, and stuffing it with sweet bay leaves, chopped cabbage, and slices of pork cut from the 'possum, plastered the whole unpicked bird with mud, and tied it up with broad blades of grass. Then raking the coals from the bass and hauling them on to palmetto plates he put the bird in their place and raked fresh coals over it.

"Jimmie, I make you my compliments," said Robert, ten minutes later; "even the bones of this fish were cooked.

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I've eaten it down to the last morsel and I wish it had been twins."

"The third course is ready, palmetto cabbage, to be eaten cold."

"I believe I'll economize on that and wait for the hen."

"You can't hurry the hen that way. She's got to set the appointed time."

The limpkin was voted the best ever and the boys were picking its bones when Robert began to question the chef:

"Where did you learn to cook birds in that scrumptious fashion?"

"I don't give away professional secrets."

"Was it really Seminole style?"

"I don't know."

"Jim, you're a fraud, but you are a good cook."

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CHAPTER X

THE INTERRUPTED FEAST

THE Boy Scouts had just begun their fifth course, 'possum *à la* nigger, when Robert stopped eating and staring past James paled perceptibly as he whispered:

"Jim, there's something awful in the bushes back there. I saw its big eyes and ugly head."

"Was it a man?"

"It might have been a wild man, though it looked more like a wild beast, but I'll know in a minute," said the boy as he jumped to his feet and made for the bush.

"I'm with you," exclaimed James, as he started after him.

"Jim, you go back. I was scared

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blue at first and broke the twelfth law of the Scouts. Now I'm going to tackle that thing alone to get back my self-respect."

"How about my self-respect? Haven't I as much right to be eaten by the beast as you?"

It was not a pleasant sight that met the eyes of the boys as they entered the thicket, but it was pity they felt and not fear. Crouching before them was a huge negro whose ugly face had been ravaged by fear and famine. The few rags that hung loosely about him failed to hide the cruel scars on his starved body. His left arm, which hung helpless at his side, was blood-encrusted, and an unwashed, open wound suggested the passage of a bullet. The negro was the first one to speak.

"I ain't goin' back!"

"Now, you aren't ever going back, but you are going to have all you can eat right now," said James in a voice that

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was husky. Wonder filled the eyes of the half-demented creature as he followed the boy like a dog to the camp where the carcass of the 'possum was thrust out to him. He seized it fiercely and tearing it with his teeth ate like a ravenous wild beast. When he had devoured the last fragment, his eyes turned longingly to a brace of brown curlew, or young ibis, that Robert had placed on the coals to broil. James shook his head, saying:

"You mustn't eat any more now. By and by you shall have the birds. I am going to wash that sore on your arm now and fix it up so it won't hurt you. Robert, please braid a good broad bandage for this arm and another long enough for a sling."

There was something besides fear in the outcast's eyes as he followed James to the stream, and the wonder in his face deepened almost into awe as the boy took his hand and tenderly washed the black-

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ened blood from his arm. James set his teeth hard to stop the quiver of his lips, while his face grew white as he cut away the ragged and gangrened edges of the wound and washed away the maggots from the neglected sore. He covered the torn flesh with soft leaves and bandaged it as gently as if it had been the white arm of a girl. The negro sat silent and dazed till the work was done and a sling adjusted to support his arm, when with a half-articulate cry he seized the hand of the boy and lifted it to his lips. When more food was offered he took it quietly and ate slowly, often turning his eyes upon his benefactor. He spoke only in answer to questions but gradually his story came out. He spoke dispassionately. Cruelty had been his daily fare so long that he had ceased to resent it. He had committed some trifling theft and after a three months' sentence had been taken from the calaboose by the waiting agent of a turpentine

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company. He was handy with the ax and for a few days was able to escape punishment, but day by day his task was increased until he was often unable to accomplish it. Thereafter the lash was his daily portion and his life one long-drawn agony. When it became insupportable he ran away, was caught and brought back. There was so little left of his term of service that it was decided to utilize him as an example to his fellow convicts. As the big negro told in his stolid manner of being staked out by the cruel overseer of the turpentine company, he was interrupted by James who in broken tones exclaimed:

"Don't tell us of that. It's all written on your back and I can't bear to hear it. Tell us how you got away."

The negro explained that he was left on the ground and not chained that night, that he crawled away, was followed into the swamp, but escaped with a bullet through his arm.

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"What do you think of the chain-gang, Bob?" asked James, when the story had been told.

"I can't think of such torture and I'd like to smash the fiendish system."

"I am with you, Robert, heart and soul. I can pledge my family to do all they can. Let's enlist every Boy Scout we can reach. Now we must forage for food, for we've got a new mouth to fill and it is the biggest one I ever saw."

It was late when the boys returned, laden with fish, flesh, and fruit, but their guest had departed as suddenly as he came.

In two days James had finished one shirt and was well advanced on another, while Robert had completed his buncombe net. The net was taken to the little creek and tried out at once. It was set across the stream and the boys, wading, drove fish toward it. Many escaped, but the net was so laden with bass, perch, and sunfish that three hauls gave

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the fishermen all they could carry to camp. After the first haul Robert proposed to stop fishing, saying:

"We've got all the fish we can eat before they spoil and we don't want to waste them."

"Waste nothing, Bob! You don't want to stay here forever, and we have got to have a lot of stores before we start. We must start a drying- and smoking-plant and cure a good stock of the flesh of fish, birds, and turtle."

"How do you know that I don't want to stay here forever? I can't remember ever having had a better time, but if you are in a hurry to get away I'll help you accumulate grub."

That night they built a scaffold of green poles above their fire and slicing the fish into thin strips began the process of curing them. Thereafter until they abandoned the camp the curing-plant never ceased its work.

In providing birds for the larder the

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young Scouts had left undisturbed a little rookery that was near their camp until the mother birds had become as tame as chickens. They were especially fearless of Robert, whom one mother ibis permitted to come within arm's length of her nest, while a water turkey simply moved aside and approvingly watched the boy as he fed her progeny with insects and bits of frog or turtle.

"How do you manage it, Bob? The birds that let you handle them squawk when I go near their nests, and our camp coon that eats our scraps won't let me get within a rod of him."

"The coon is as shy of me as of you and you haven't been as patient with the birds as you might have been."

"That isn't it, for I have been patienter than Job would have been. You've got the knack of handling them or there is something about you they like and I am going to make that coon like me or I'll break his neck."

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"How will you do it?"

"I am going to build a pen for him this minute and then I'll snare him and put him in the pen. After that I'll feed him by hand and cuff him till he is fond of me."

James built the pen and setting the snare in the coon's usual path, along which he put bits of fish, soon had the creature ensnared. Together the boys got the coon in the pen, unharmed, which was more than they could say for themselves, for though neither was bitten, both were well scratched. From almost the first the coon took food from its master's hand and dipping it in a shell of water which James had placed in the pen rolled the morsel in its paws before eating it according to the custom of coons. In two days it was let out of the pen and in another was tame as a kitten and twice as mischievous. The little plantigrade, whose family is built like a bear but named after a rat, was so in-

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terested in the working of the Boy Scout loom that James proposed to train it to serve as a shuttle and carry the thread for the woof back and forth as the beam of the loom rose and fell.

The building and operation of this loom is simplicity itself and should be understood by every boy camper. The one made by our young Scouts was constructed by lashing to trees a three foot pole, placed horizontally two feet above the ground. At every three inches of its length strands of heavy cane grass were tied and extended for six feet in parallel lines at right angles to the pole, to a row of stakes two feet high. These strands constitute half the warp of the mattress or curtain. Between each two of these strands another one seven feet long runs a foot beyond the stakes to a movable beam that rises and falls as each strand of the woof is fed across the fabric.

Robert was the weaver of the firm

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and by careful work and the use of colored grasses in the woof secured a product with which, as James assured him, no ancient Persian rug or modern Navajo blanket could compare. By the time the curtain was finished and hung and Robert was through admiring it James had finished the shirts.

"Now, Jimmie, you look decent, and I can present you to the Seminole Minnehaha with some chance that the 'ancient arrow-maker' won't chuck you out of the wigwam," said Robert as he stood back and gazed at his companion arrayed in his new shirt, belted with the skin of *chinte chobee,* the great snake, and with feet encased in the hide of *alpate,* the alligator.

"This is all right for the Seminoles, but we want some short pants before we show up at home. We can make those in two or three days, and by that time we'll have all the smoked stuff we can

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carry. Then—Ho, for the Injun camps!"

It was three days before the young Scouts were ready to break camp, for the trunks they braided had to be lined with rabbit skin to make them wearable.

"I feel as if I were leaving home," said Robert as, with his pack on his back, he turned for a last look at their camp.

"Why it is our home—one of them—Bob, and we are coming back to it next year."

"Sure, we will, Jimmie, and we'll bring our Patrol of the Boy Scouts. I'll be a Second Class Scout by then, and if you follow my instructions and example you may get into the First Class."

"If you don't cultivate more respect for your official superiors you may have even your Tenderfoot badge taken away."

"Just look at that coon, Jim, sitting up in the sapling," interrupted Robert.

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"He means to take possession as soon as we are out of sight."

"I move we dedicate the camp to the Boy Scouts of America. Then we will make the best map we can of the trail and if any of the Scouts want to try a long hike they can have it."

"That goes, Jim, and the coon will hold the camp for the Boy Scouts."

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"'THE COON WILL HOLD THE CAMP FOR THE BOY SCOUTS'"

Page 132

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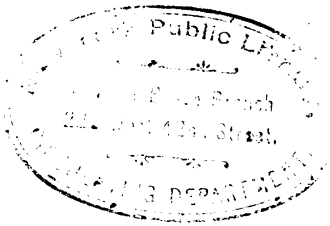

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CHAPTER XI

IN THE BIG CYPRESS

THAT night the Boy Scouts camped again by the Everglades and this time beside a camp-fire, for James had carried live coals packed in ashes in a cocoanut-shell and enough were left to start a new fire.

Robert had laughed at him for carrying fire, saying:

"You have your fire-stick and bow in your pack. Why don't you show faith in them? Besides, making fire with sticks is a regular Boy Scout stunt."

"It's the stunt that our Chief Scout teaches the Seton Indians at Cos Cob and that every Boy Scout should understand, but it is only intended for emer-

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gencies such as followed the burning of our camp. It wouldn't be sense to throw away an easy way of getting a fire for a hard one. A Boy Scout doesn't have to be an idiot. It is my duty as a Scout to save you from drowning, but I don't think it my duty to roll you down this bank for the sake of pulling you out of the water. Of course if you feel differently—"

"Jimmie, I was asleep during most of your spiel. Would you mind saying it over—slow?"

Little time was wasted over breakfast the next morning. A pound or so of smoked fish or turtle, followed by a handful of figs, was washed down by a cocoanutful of the clear water of the Everglades in which a lime had been squeezed and the beverage subsequently sweetened by the chewing of a stick of sugar cane. There was no table to clear off nor dishes to wash and when packs had been resumed Robert turned to his su-

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perior officer and making the Scout salute said:

"Sire, what are your commands?"

"Sirrah, get a move on, hit the trail to the north, and keep to the line between the Big Cypress and the Everglades."

"But Your Majesty would observe, if you were less blind than a bat, that a narrow patch of the Everglades thrusts itself miles to the west, while beyond it a strand of cypress is poked eastward a mile into the Glades. Has your Highness in mind to travel twelve miles to gain two hundred yards on your journey?"

"My Highness has in mind the establishment of an asylum for my feeble-minded subjects."

The course of the Scouts led through water that at times was ankle deep and at others rose to their waists. Sometimes they sank in mud to their knees and sometimes walked upon the rough surface of uncovered coral rock. They

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waded through beds of lilies with long stems that tangled their legs and crossed patches of serrated saw-grass that scored their shins at each step. When this grass became heavy they turned aside to the Big Cypress Swamp and waded and wallowed through its dark recesses kicking aside the little brown moccasins that crossed their path, sheering away from the coiled speckle-bellies, and giving a wide berth to the repulsive cotton-mouths. Alligators scuttled out of their path and bitterns took slow wing before them. The melodies of song-birds came down from the tree-tops beneath which in the gloom buzzards swept on outstretched, unbeating wings.

"Did you ever see anything so dismal?" asked James.

"I don't call it dismal. It is weird and I never knew the full meaning of the word before," replied the romantic Robert.

It was early in the afternoon when

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they came upon a place of dry ground as large as a big rug and they decided to camp on it for the night. They had done a hard day's work and traveled half a score of miles to gain half that distance on their course.

"It's me for a good square rest, Jimmie," said Robert, as he leaned his back against a tree after having driven the old snake population out of camp. "The Seminoles must tan the hide on their legs. There isn't any skin left on mine. I need a length of stove-pipe on each one to protect it."

"It's our own fault, for we ought to have kept out of that saw-grass," said James, who had just succeeded in starting a fire. "We'll make a long camp of this and wake up with new legs to-morrow."

"Ouch!" exclaimed Robert, "something is biting my back—and my neck and the rest of me. They must be young bulldogs. See! They are black ants,

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big as roaches, and the tree is alive with 'em and there's an army of them on the ground. Jim, this little oasis in the swamp, as I called it when I first saw it, must belong to these ants. Let's light out."

"In just a minute, soon as I can pack up my fire. We will keep to the east till we strike the Everglades. Maybe we have passed that strand of saw-grass."

An hour later they stood on the brink of the Glades on a bit of dry land beneath a lone palmetto.

"Couldn't ask for a lovelier place to camp, Jim. Look at the bright sun on the water and see the brilliant clouds. And the green keys and the white flowers. It almost makes my eyes ache after the gloom of the swamp. And look! There goes an Indian canoe with two Seminoles poling it and what looks like a woman and a baby sitting down between them. They don't seem to see us."

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"Of course they don't show that they see us but they do, all the same. I think if we signaled them they would come to us."

"But we don't want them to, Jimmie. We are getting along all right by ourselves and having oodles of fun. By and by, we will find one of their camps, without help from anybody and we'll trade for a canoe and strike out for Myers when we get good and ready."

"Glad to see you so cheerful. An hour ago you seemed disposed to criticise Seminole customs."

"It was Seminole legs out of place that I found fault with. Seminole legs in a Seminole canoe are appropriate and I approve of them. That's the way the Seminole wears them when he is traveling through saw-grass."

Everything went well the next day. The walking was easy, through shallow meadows of soft grass interspersed with beds of lilies and dotted with tiny keys.

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On one of these they found an abandoned Seminole camp and as the day was nearly done they took possession for the night. They found a banana-plant with a bunch of ripening bananas and some taniers which they roasted and thought better than any potatoes they had ever eaten.

"Here's treasure-trove," exclaimed James, as he picked up an old lard-pail. "I see in this, turtle soup and ibis stew, chowder of fish, and tea made of sweet-bay leaves."

"I'll pick a lot of the leaves and we'll have a cup now to christen your find," said Robert, and soon the boys were sipping the fragrant beverage while the younger one, who dreamed dreams and saw visions, evolved from the pictures formed by the curling smoke of their camp-fire a romance of the great Osceola, the Seminole Father of his Country. It was counted a coincidence when later it was discovered that the aban-

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doned camp belonged to Tommy Osceola, a direct descendant of the famous chief.

In sublunar affairs, as in bacon, the lean alternates with the fat, and the next day's march was due to be a hard one, which it proved to be. The saw-grass drove the Boy Scouts to the swamp and kept them there until near the setting of the sun, when they struck a well-traveled trail that led straight to a Seminole camp within the border of the Everglades.

It was the most important Indian camp in the country. Besides four large palmetto shacks for eating and sleeping there was a wooden building across which was a large sign:

"MR. CHARLEY TIGERTAIL'S STORE."

There is little ceremony in a Seminole camp and to show curiosity is to lose

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caste. You sit at table or dip your hand in the common dish at will and you make your bed on the table of your choice, knowing that however you may offend you will never hear of it from the Indians.

But traditions were forgotten and convention put aside in the welcome of the Indians to the Boy Scouts. Scarcely had they arrived when with a hearty, "*Humbuggus cha*" (come eat), they were led to the cooking camp, *sofke* spoons placed in their hands, and they were invited to partake of the *sofke* mess, which was the staple food of the camp. A Seminole seldom speaks English when it can be avoided but custom was ignored and from the oldest Indian to the youngest pickaninny the boys heard "English as she is spoke" by the Seminoles.

One and all were curious about the braided shirts, the alligator belts and moccasins; and although the older ones were forbearing, the investigations of

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the pickaninnies were at times embarrassing.

The boys told their hosts of their adventures, only to find them already known. From the burning of their canoe and stores down to their last night's stay at Tommy Osceola's camp, every step had been known or inferred. Indians had seen them on their first visit to the Everglades, the big negro had brought up at a Seminole camp, but whence the rest of the information came is the old time mystery of the wilderness. From the prairies of our own continent to the pampas of South America, from the arid desert of Sahara to the submerged fertility of the Everglades, all wild people have wireless methods of quick communication. From the beating of drums in equatorial forests to columns of smoke on mountain tops, each people has its own mysterious method.

James found it a simple matter to buy a canoe of Charley Tigertail. He told

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the Indian what he wanted and in a few minutes a pickaninny was poling a little Seminole canoe in front of the camp. A moment later half a dozen, or more, little Indians climbed aboard the craft, which remained steady as a rock while they played in it.

"I like that canoe. What shall I pay you for it?"

"Twenty dollar, me think so."

"That's all right but I haven't any money here."

"You take canoe, pay bimeby, all right."

"Where can I send the money so that you will get it?"

"Bimeby, pretty quick, maybe so two months, me go Everglade. You pay George Storter, same as me."

At a word from Tigertail the pickaninnies brought the canoe to the little dock and scrambled out. James picked up a pole and stepped aboard, or rather overboard, for the time spent in the ca-

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noe wasn't enough to count. Robert shouted with glee and the children laughed with him, but Tigertail's face was like that of a graven image. Yet there was humor in his quiet question:

"Big canoe, you like him better, maybe so?"

James shook his head and after a Seminole had rolled the water out of the canoe in Indian fashion, he stepped into the canoe, carefully balancing with his pole, while Robert followed him. They soon learned to turn the canoe and were making fair headway when suddenly the canoe rolled from under them. As Robert floundered to his feet, for the water was hardly waist deep, he exclaimed:

"Jim, you did that on purpose," and as Jim didn't deny it there is no reason why we should.

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CHAPTER XII

SHARPSHOOTING

THE interest of the Indians in the outfit of the boys never relaxed. One girl was so interested in the braid of James' shirt that he gathered long grass and showed her how it was done. He set up a loom for another and soon braiding and weaving was the fashion among the Indian maidens.

"Look here, Brigham Hiawatha, what do you mean by trifling with the affection of these young ladies? Both of them expect you to marry them. What will your mother say to two squaw daughters-in-law?"

"Don't be envious, Robert, you can't help being unattractive, but you might learn to be good."

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Robert soon had an audience of his own for he produced his bow and arrows and the camp gathered about him. Here was something that appealed to them, for though with modern Indians the rifle has taken the place of the bow, yet the inherited love of the latter remains with the red man.

Robert was urged to try his weapon and a calabash hanging from a tree some fifty yards distant was pointed out as a target. The boy made a good shot, though he missed the calabash by a narrow margin. He then handed the bow with an arrow to a young Seminole who was eagerly watching him, and with a motion of his hand challenged him to take a shot at the same target.

But the bow is the Indian's weapon and the white man is rash who challenges him. As the Indian took the bow he spoke to a pickaninny who, darting into the nearest shack, returned with a Seminole bow and arrows. Without

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even a trial bend of Robert's bow the Indian he had challenged sent with it an arrow so true that it struck the edge of the calabash and set it whirling. Then taking his own bow from the boy who had brought it he sent a swift arrow that struck the target as it whirled.

"He could shoot ten arrows upward,
Shoot them with such strength and swiftness,
That the tenth had left the bow string,
Ere the first to earth had fallen,"

quoted Robert, while James exclaimed: "Oh, Bob, Bob, how could you be so rash? You might challenge an otter to swim or an eagle to fly with you, but an Indian with a bow! Why, one of these pickaninnies could wallop you with his eyes shut. You've disgraced us, Bob, and the only way to redeem yourself is to get up a match with rifles. You can skin 'em alive at that, for thanks to the way I've brought you up you are really a dabster with firearms. Why, I

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know a man who has hunted with a dozen tribes of Indians and he told me he had never seen one who could shoot for sour apples with a rifle or pistol."

Robert was so low in his mind that he didn't resent his companion's chaffing, but said:

"Guess you are right this time, Jimmie, and it's up to me to uphold the honor of the white man. There are Winchesters in the shacks that look all right, and if the sights haven't been hocus-pocused and they are as bad shots as you say, I can get back at them. Wonder how I can manage to get them into the game?"

But he didn't have to manage at all, for the youth who had beaten him with the bow brought out his own rifle and by signs challenged him to a contest. Robert tried to look indifferent as he accepted, but the attempt was a failure and his friend whispered to him:

"You are giving yourself away, Bob,

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and if you are half as excited when you come to shoot we'll lose out for keeps."

"Don't worry about that, for I shoot better when I am a little excited. I know the rifle all right, it's almost new and the sights haven't been fooled with, so that redskin has got to do some shooting to win out."

The Seminole chose the old calabash for a target and as he prepared to fire not an Indian in camp, whether squaw or pickaninny, was missing from his audience. When the rifle cracked the calabash swayed and a fragment fell from it. The Indians looked pleased and a pickaninny running to the target pointed out where the bullet had cut the calabash.

"Lucky that gourd was a big one," said Robert in a low tone. "The bullet was two inches out of line and four below the center. Now watch me cut the string."

"Don't try it, Bob, for a mistake of a quarter of an inch will make a clean miss

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and the whole camp will think you can't hit a deer at ten rods."

"It isn't so hard as it looks, for I've only got to make a line shot and the elevation may be out three inches. If I do miss I'll get you to hold one of these custard apples on your head while I plunk it through the center."

"I really believe I'd rather hold it than see you miss."

As Robert fired the calabash fell to the ground, but the contest was not decided, for most of the Indians believed that the target had been missed and that cutting the string was an accident. But old Tigertail was in doubt for he had seen white men shoot and having ordered a youth to hang up the calabash with another string, motioned to Robert to fire again.

Robert refused, saying:

"I never have to shoot twice at one thing. Let Ingraham Charley fire at that bird and after he has missed it you

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shall see me kill it," and the boy pointed to a duck that was swimming in the open water a hundred yards distant.

"Well played, Rob," whispered James. "You have got out of cutting the string, which you couldn't do again; and if the duck doesn't fly you've a bully chance to win out and if you do they will adopt you into the tribe."

"That Injun isn't going to scare the bird. See him putting his sight up to about four hundred yards. His bullet will go a mile over the duck."

The whistle of the missile above the bird sent it skurrying for a few yards but failed to persuade it to leave the water. Robert took the rifle and throwing a cartridge into the barrel lowered the sight and taking careful aim, fired. The duck's head dropped, its wings spread out upon the water, and Robert's reputation as a sure shot was established among the Seminoles.

"I didn't know till you were about to

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fire, how anxious I was for you to win, Bob. I believe I'd have fainted if you had missed."

"Guess I'd better not shoot any more, for such luck can't last. Hitting that string was half chance and the duck's not flying when Ingraham fired was just a plain miracle."

"Tigertail told me that Ingraham Charley wanted you to go hunting with him in the morning. Says you can have his rifle and he will show you plenty *echu* (deer) and *panewa* (turkey)."

"Jim, I won't go and that's flat. It's up to you. You can shoot as well as I can and I'm not going to take all the plums in the pudding."

"Don't perjure yourself, Bobbie, but do as you're told and run along."

"No use talking, Jim, for I am going to stay in camp to-morrow and play with the pickaninnies. They are a nice bunch of kids."

James went out with Ingraham at day-

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light and returned before noon, the Indian carrying a buck on his back and the boy lugging two fat gobblers.

" 'But the heart of Hiawatha,
Throbbed and shouted and exulted,
As he bore the red deer homeward,' "

sang Robert as he welcomed his chum. "Now tell us all about it, Jim."

"Not much to tell. I saw a doe and a fawn and the Indian was disgusted because I wouldn't shoot them, but I told him it was bad medicine to shoot fawns and that white men only killed deer that had horns. I know he didn't believe me, but he was too polite to say so, and just pretended that he didn't understand me. We jumped the buck that we brought in and I got a good running shot at him in a little open space between two clumps of bushes. He kept right on and I thought I had missed him but luckily didn't say so. I went into the thicket with Ingraham and we found the buck dead, with a

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bullet near his heart, a dozen yards from where I had shot him. Then a funny thing happened. A doe—I guess she was his mate—came within three yards of the buck and of us. She wasn't in any hurry to go away and Ingraham looked at me as if he thought I was *holo-waugus* (no good). He bled and cleaned the buck and hung him in a tree to be picked up on our way back.

"After that we twisted about a lot and I found it hard to keep our courses in my head. Then we came upon a bunch of gobblers, not a hen-turkey in the crowd. I bagged one of them and the rest flew off to kingdom come, for all I could see. But the Seminole followed them, by smell I reckon, for a half mile to where they had lit in some trees. I got another and from the way the rest of them started off they must be going yet. We walked for an hour in a straight line that I could see was taking us farther and farther from camp, when I made up my mind to

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come home. I told Ingraham we had shot enough and it was time to go back to camp. He said 'all right' but kept straight on. I was thinking of leaving him and coming back by myself, when we came to the carcass of the buck I had shot some hours before. I was pretty badly turned around, but I hope the Indian didn't find it out. That's my report; now what happened to you?"

"I've had a strenuous time. First, your Minnehaha got stuck on her shirt-weaving and I helped her out, on your account. Then I went out in our little canoe with one of the pickaninnies and the young reptile rolled the thing over just as he saw you do it yesterday. It must have been a put up job for when the performance came off every squaw in camp had a seat in the orchestra and they'd have been encoring us till now if they had known how. I evened up with them though, for I got out your fire-sticks and started a fire with the whole

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camp looking on, and it put the kibosh on the whole crowd. They think I am big medicine, except Tigertail, who puts up a bluff and says his people made fire with sticks long time ago, before white soldiers carried Billy Bowlegs away. You know the Seminoles date everything from that, but look at Ingraham over there talking to a bunch of Indians. I'll bet anything to nothing that he is telling about your hunt this morning. I wonder how much you left out. Do you know, Jimmie, I believe we could open a recruiting station for the Boy Scouts right here and enlist every squaw, pickaninny, and Indian in the camp?"

That the young Scouts had made themselves popular was evident the next morning, when the whole camp gathered to see them off. Little was said, but Tigertail's farewell words:

"Come my camp, stay long time, me glad," conveyed as hearty an invitation as was ever engraved on a Tiffany plate.

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The boys could have had their will of the camp-stores, but they took nothing but a few matches, a little salt, and a haunch of venison, and in return James presented Tigertail his fire-sticks, a gift which was received with near-reverence.

"Now, Jimmie," said Robert as they started away in their little canoe, "the eyes of the nation are upon you and you must stand up to your job like a man. Don't wriggle around in that spineless way as if you were an angleworm, for every time you wiggle you wobble the canoe. There are two canoes chasing us, James, and, by my halidom, one contains Minnehaha and your two other girls. What will your mother say?"

"Bob, if you don't stop turning around you'll capsize the canoe and destroy any good impression we have made."

"Nothing will destroy the impression you have made on the hearts of those

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Indian maidens; but see, they have stopped, they weep. Turn and look your last upon your victims, perfidious one."

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CHAPTER XIII

THE PHANTOM TRAIL

HOUR by hour the Scouts became more expert in managing the canoe. They stood more nearly upright, balanced instinctively, and Robert, as his confidence grew, began to throw his weight back on his pole, letting part of his body swing over the water beyond the canoe, in true Seminole fashion. A quick thrust at the end of each stroke gave him back his balance in readiness for the next one. At last in the joyous swing of his new accomplishment he went too far, or perhaps the pole stuck or slipped, and he failed to recover his balance. He climbed the long pole with active hands to lift his body within the canoe, but when the end of the pole was

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reached, his center of gravity was still outside the craft. They were passing through a stream of saw-grass and the motion of the canoe was so slow that the boy clung on, hoping against hope that it would cease entirely. James saw the trouble and by a quick motion attempted to push the canoe toward his companion. But this mistaken action swung Robert's end of the craft away from him and only hastened the catastrophe. Robert and his pole now formed the two sides of an inverted V with the angle becoming more obtuse each second. Slowly the boy's body settled down toward the water while the strain on his arms increased. Each fragment of a second seemed to him like a long-drawn minute until the end came and he fell full length upon the surface of the saw-grass that choked the water. James had dropped to the bottom of the canoe and, helped by the stiff saw-grass kept it from capsizing. Robert climbed back and his

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work for the next hour was no less efficient than before, even though he tried no more acrobatic stunts with his pole.

"We ought to be near the trail to Conapatchee's camp," said James, as he studied the surface of a wide area of open water broken only by scanty tops of the grass of a submerged meadow. "From the way Tigertail talked of the trail it must be something as plain as a turnpike with a high fence."

"Indians don't need a trail, for they keep maps of the country in their minds."

"Some of them do more than that, Bob. When Ingraham hunted with me he had a map of the game as well as the country in his mind. He pointed out tracks that I couldn't see after he had shown them to me and he told where the deer and the turkeys were before it was possible to see them. I wish I could learn the trick of it. I'd be High Muck-a-muck among the Boy Scouts."

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"You had better learn some of your plain duties, Jim, before talking of impossible honors. How about the second pledge of your Scout oath; 'To help other people at all times;' and were you helping me when you pushed the canoe away from me and made me fall into the water where the horrible teeth of the saw-grass flayed my hands and face?"

"Why you impertinent prevaricator! You were breaking the oath yourself and that's what got you in trouble. In the third pledge you promised to keep yourself mentally awake and morally straight. Now when your trouble came instead of keeping straight you were leaning over like the tower of Pisa, and you were about as mentally awake as an Egyptian mummy."

"When you are through trying to talk, Jimmie, just cast your eye toward the western horizon. Don't look for anything in particular but see if you can't feel that a canoe has passed that

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way, a little to the right of that bunch of grass."

"I don't know whether it is your imagination or mine, Bobbie, but I do seem to feel a trail and we'll follow it to the Big Cypress if we can."

As they followed the phantom trail it seemed more and more like a real one, until they reached the border of the swamp, when an Indian canoe drawn up on a bank dispelled all doubts. Thereafter the trail was plain and led them through a winding channel of clear water beneath overhanging branches of tall trees from which depended long, swaying streamers of Spanish moss. Emerging from the gloomy recesses of the swamp the Boy Scouts came upon an open glade brilliant with cloud-reflected sunshine and bounded on its western side by a typical Seminole camp.

"It must be the Isle of the Hesperides," exclaimed Robert. "You know they lived in the West, by the setting

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sun, and their home couldn't have been lovelier than this. Then there are the golden apples, Jimmie."

"And there's the dragon that guards those apples and he has got a Winchester in his hands and he'll 'git you if you don't watch out.' "

It was the Seminole, Conapatchee, with his young son, who awaited them and welcomed them with the dignity of an Indian, the only truly native American among us. The coming of his guests was no surprise to Conapatchee, for the mysterious wireless had delivered its message, and he knew of the wanderings of the young Scouts from the time their canoe was burned. His camp of five shacks of palmetto thatch was merry with the play and shouting of nine pickaninnies, as care-free and fun-loving as so many civilized youngsters.

At first they were shy but Robert soon cured that and in half an hour had them playing tag all over the island, while the

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squaws laughed and cheered the children on. He challenged the biggest of the boys to a canoe-race and through his greater strength and lighter craft might have won if he could have kept from capsizing, which he couldn't. When he came ashore, streaming with water, the courteous Conapatchee was the only one in camp who didn't even smile, but the Indian showed his sense of humor by putting little three-year-old Tadpole in a canoe and challenging Robert to race with him. The red man's heart is like his white brother's and Robert had captured Conapatchee's when he won the affection of his children.

The Indian got in the canoe with the young Boy Scout and poled with him for an hour that Robert will never forget. He taught the boy every trick of the craft, driving it ahead and backwards, turning it quickly to one side or the other, and throwing his whole weight on the pole and his body outside the

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canoe as he did it. Remembering his experience of the morning Robert threw his weight on the pole with caution and each time was thrown overboard by a sudden twist of the craft. Half angry at the treatment he was receiving, Robert threw caution to the winds and swung recklessly about in closest imitation of his teacher. Not again did the hollowed log slip from under him and always it was firm beneath his feet whether he stood upright or hung far over its side. He felt the joy of having mastered the craft, until one little slip which would have sent him overboard but for the quick balancing of the canoe by the Indian, taught him that he had yet something to learn. It was a strenuous hour for the young Scout and he stepped ashore with aching muscles and reeking with sweat, while the red man was cool and calm as a May morning.

"Bobbie, you stood up to it well," said James, who had seen part of the per-

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formance, "and you've the making of a good Indian in you. What a beautiful system of teaching they have. You either learn or they kill you. The Boy Scouts ought to adopt it in the training of Tenderfeet. When one of them begins to argue, the way you sometimes do, instead of obeying the order of the superior officer, he should be knocked endwise."

"Jim, I'm tired and every bone aches, but I'd admire to teach you how to pole a canoe, Seminole fashion."

When Conapatchee was told that the Scouts proposed to leave the next morning he protested and urged them to stay over for a day's hunt. He said that he would take Robert while James could go with Charley Cypress who lived in his camp. He promised the younger boy a shot at a bear, though to get it he might have to sleep in the swamp one night.

Robert could scarcely sleep for excite-

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ment, though in the night he whispered to his chum:

"You've got to go with Conapatchee, Jim, and have a chance at a bear. It's your turn, and I mean to go with Cypress."

"No you don't, Bob. You can't pass an invitation around that way, and if you did, Conapatchee would scalp you and be justified in doing it. Besides I'm on to your game. You know that Injun's goin' to larn you to hunt bear, same as he taught you to pole a boat, and he'll come home day after to-morrow dragging what's left of you by the hair of your head. No, Bobbie, it's me for Cypress and the simple life."

Robert started with Conapatchee at early dawn and before the day was over he thought many times of Jimmie's prediction. For the tramp was unceasing though slow, and their path led through the densest swamps and the thickest brush. The Indian glided in advance,

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bearing only a package of food, while the boy followed carrying a Winchester which, before the close of the day, seemed as heavy as a piece of artillery.

He crawled through thickets where thorn bushes raked his flesh and held him back, climbed over fallen, rotten trees, or dragged himself through the mire beneath them and wallowed through almost bottomless marshes as dismal as Christian's Slough of Despond. At first the reptiles repelled him but soon he ceased to care and hardly troubled himself to kick aside the moccasins that wriggled and coiled in his path. When he rustled a leaf, splashed the muddy water, or stumbled over a root, the backward glance and uplifted hand of the red man came to him as a sharp rebuke. The Indian liked him and meant to "larn" him, as James had predicted. They crossed the trails of many animals and often Robert could identify the tracks. Conapatchee

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nodded his head and half-smiled as the boy pointed out and named a freshly made panther track.

"*Kecha,*" said the Indian, and a little later, "*Nokashe,*" (bear) as he indicated the huge footprints of the big plantigrade. Conapatchee was loaded for bear and when a buck looked calmly at the hunters from a distance of twenty yards, he shook his head at Robert lest he shoot the deer, a thing the boy had no notion of doing. During the last half hour of the day their slow progress was made in almost utter silence, for Robert's rifle had been taken from him and he was scarcely allowed to breathe as he crept forward.

He slept in a thicket beside the Indian whose hand touched him in the night and he heard the tread of a heavy animal near him. The sound of the footsteps died away and the Boy Scout sat up, rifle in hand, waiting for their return. It was early dawn when the heavy tread

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was heard again. Nearer and nearer came the beast and eyes were strained to see him through the gloom of the forest and the darkness of the hour.

The hand of the red man touched the youth, who felt, rather than saw, the bulking shadow of the bear, when, catching the hated human scent and with a "Woof" that woke the echoes, the brute dashed away. In its first rush it crossed a space where the bushes were thinner, and the little light that filtered through the tree tops showed Robert the outline of the creature. In a match in his northern home the young Scout had broken at the traps ninety-five out of a hundred clay pigeons, but he never made a quicker or better shot than the snap which he took with Conapatchee's rifle at that bear in the dusk of the dawn. It was a happy chance that guided the bullet through the heart of the beast, which was dead when the Indian reached it.

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When the creature had been skinned and butchered, Conapatchee showed his pride in his pupil by giving him a man's load of bearskin and meat to carry back to camp. His own burden was greater but he carried it with ease while Robert, though he never flinched on the homeward tramp, was nearly all in as he staggered into camp.

James met him, and exclaimed:

"What business had that Indian to let you carry such a load? I'm going to tell him what I think of him."

"Don't you do it, Jim, for Conapatchee is all right and I wouldn't have missed the experience for the world. It's just as you said, when an Indian starts out to 'larn' you, he'll do it or kill you. I understand a lot now that I used to read about how they trained and toughened their children. Besides, Jimmie, that Injun's got a white soul under a red skin and he shows real affection for me."

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"Yes, of course, that's the way the world goes. You get his kids crazy and take chances of drowning them while I give him a good spiel about how the white folks like him and the missionaries want to do him good and the Government is anxious to help him. Then he drops me like a hot potato and goes canoeing with you and gives you a chance to be killed by a bear. What else has he done to show his affection?"

"Why, I offered him the bearskin, which I think belonged to him, and he wouldn't take it, but said he would cure it for me so I could show it to my people. He said, too, that I could have anything I wanted in his camp. I was going to ask him if he had a squaw he could spare you, to take the place of Minnehaha, when I thought how likely that girl was to arrive any minute and what a mix-up it would make if she found you had transferred your affections. But you haven't told me of your hunt, Jim."

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"Oh, I got a buck and Cypress and his squaw are over there dressing the hide. Than we ran across that big blackamoor that ran away from us after we fed him. Conapatchee found him in the swamp and took him to a camp of his own race, all runaway convicts, I reckon. The big darkey took me there while Cypress waited, a mile away, and the whole bunch were scared and savage when they saw me. But our man stood up like a major and told them I had been his friend and that he stood for me. They all took his word and became so friendly at once that some of them tried to borrow a chew and every one wanted a drink."

The Boy Scouts remained two more days, while hide and skin were cured as well as possible in so short a time, and then in the gray dawn they silently parted from the red friends they had made.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE MEETING IN THE EVERGLADES

AS the young Scouts poled into the east, beneath the deep shadows of the swamp, they left Conapatchee standing in full ceremonial costume beside his home. Cypress followed the boys far into the open Glades and as he stood upright in his canoe for a minute before turning back, they waved him farewell and James exclaimed:

"I hope, Bob, that we will never forget how good they were to us in that Indian camp."

"That's all right for you, Jim, but if Conapatchee had dumped you out of a canoe till you were half-drowned and yanked you for hours through a swamp

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"THEY LEFT CONAPATCHEE STANDING IN FULL CEREMONIAL COSTUME BESIDE HIS HOME"

Page 176

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till you were 'most dead, you would talk different."

"Gwan, Bob, he was only making a man of you."

The goal for the day was Boat Landing, near the famous Fort Shackelford of long ago. From here a cart path led across the prairie to Immokalee, an outskirt of civilization. Burdened with a canoe, they could not make detours by land around saw-grass-strands, but must find and follow Seminole trails.

"It's up to you, Jimmie, to pull us through," said Robert, as they turned northward where the Everglades were open and trackless. "I saw you and Conapatchee making medicine with charcoal on turtle shells. Was it perchance a chart of the Everglades, or were you working spells for the exorcising of demons or mayhap winning the hearts of Indian maidens?"

"Bob, while you were making trouble

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in the Conapatchee nursery I was laboring for the common good. That Indian has gone over the trail to Boat Landing with me both ways, sidewise and upside down. He has drawn pictures of every key and sketched all the strands of sawgrass and outlined every trail in this part of the country. He probably thinks I'm crazy, from the foolish questions I asked him, but I believe I have really got a map in my head that is going to take us to Boat Landing without a slip."

"If you do that, Jim, I'll testify that as a pathfinder Leatherstocking was a duffer in comparison with you."

There was little said by either of the Boy Scouts that morning for James was studying, always studying the surroundings. His glances roved from the eastern horizon, where the blue sky and the Everglade waters met, to the Big Cypress Swamp in the west, and noted the indentations of each little bay, and the

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outthrusting lines of bushes which marked the channels where the rivers of the West Coast had their beginning. He looked upon each nearby key and scanned the distant waters for the tops of tall palmettos pointing out islands beneath the horizon. Backward and forward he gazed, as he lined his course across trackless wastes of water by tall trees and low, grassy islands, projecting points of land, and the sun in the heavens. Each time that a broad band of impassable saw-grass was struck, the bow of the canoe, like the needle to the pole, pointed out the narrow Seminole trail that crossed it. No thought of the dinner hour came to the young Scouts, for Robert's interest was intense in the problem that his chum was working out, and when he first caught sight of the building that marked the mission station at Boat Landing he burst out:

"James Howard, you are a Jim Dandy of an Everglade pilot and there isn't a

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Seminole in the tribe that could do what you have done to-day!"

"Bobbie, Bobbie, don't talk so loud or somebody may hear you and take you to the bughouse. Why, Boy, there isn't a pickaninny in the tribe that couldn't have done it with his eyes shut, while I had to puzzle my brains every minute and was never half sure I was right. I wouldn't like to tell you just how surprised I was when Boat Landing turned up."

"But, Jim, these Everglade Indians are born in a canoe and they've got an inherited knowledge of trails that amounts to a sixth sense, yet I don't believe many of them could have come as straight as you did on a trail they had only heard of."

"They don't have to have things hammered into their heads as I do, for they know so much of it by instinct. Just think how three-year-old Tadpole handled this canoe, which seemed to know

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him and wouldn't have capsized him for the world, while it is laying low this minute for a chance to roll us out."

"Yes, Jim, and those other pickaninnies that climbed in bunches over canoes that stood up as if they had lead keels, and do you remember the first two Seminoles we saw in the Glades, the fellows that wouldn't see us? Why it was like listening to poetry to watch them at work."

"There comes another poem, Bob, out from Boat Landing, a canoe with two Indians poling and another sitting down."

"I see them, but, Jim, that isn't poetry or even blank verse. Why, that duffer in the bow looks as if he were going to fall overboard. He is almost as awkward as you used to be. He can't be a Seminole. Wonder if he isn't a Seton Indian."

"He isn't the only crank in the craft, for the fellow in the middle is waving

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something like mad. Why he's wigwagging! B.E.A.R. That's our patrol sign and there is Brady, our Patrol Leader, with two other Scouts! But no, that fellow in the stern is a sure-enough Seminole."

"Do you s'pose they are coming for us, or just out on a hike?"

"I am afraid they are out for us, Jim. Those Indians that you said didn't see us, must have talked about what they didn't see. Wonder if our folks got scared and sent Fred Brady and Jack Beardsley out to hunt us up."

"We'll never hear the last of it, if they did."

"Let's roll 'em out of their canoe, Jim, and give 'em something of their own to think of. I can do it so naturally that even that Seminole won't suspect me."

"Don't you dare to try it, Bob!"

"Don't *you* dare, you mean, for you'd sure make a muddle of it and give the

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whole snap away. Likely you'd get tried by court-martial and maybe have your badge taken away."

"Robert, it won't do. It isn't fair to the fellows. Besides we would be found out."

"Never you fear that. You just keep as straight as you can and when you go overboard you won't believe but what it's an accident, yourself."

The two parties of Scouts shouted greetings as they approached, and Jack in the bow of the Seminole's canoe was so unsteady with his pole that the Indian, stepping from side to side of the craft to keep it trimmed, looked darkly at the boy.

There were hearty greetings as the canoes came together and Brady clasped Jim's free hand between both of his own, while the latter steadied the unstable dugout with his pole. At the same time Jack seized Robert's outstretched hand drawing it involuntarily toward

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him. This threw Jim's end of the canoe out just enough to spoil his balance and the next moment Brady and Jim, clinging together, came down on the sides of their respective canoes, both of which rolled completely over. Robert's attempt at quick balancing had been a failure and he went even deeper beneath the surface than his companions. Water and mud were less than shoulder deep and when the sputtering was over and the Boy Scouts looked about them they saw with surprise that the upper part of the Indian's body was dry, showing that the descendant of Osceola had merely stepped overboard instead of being pitched headlong. It was remembered afterward by James that a quizzical expression crossed the Seminole's face as he looked at Robert.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jim, that I pulled you over. It was all my clumsiness," said Brady.

"It was just as much my fault," po-

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litely replied James, and his statement was true though he didn't know it.

"I ought to have balanced better when I felt the thing going," remarked Robert sadly, and no one knew the depth of the truth he was uttering.

Robert and James rolled their little canoe back and forth till they had swashed the water out of it and caused Brady to exclaim:

"It is worth a ducking to learn that trick."

Soon the larger canoe was rolled dry and while James and Robert waded and swam around, picking up articles that floated, the others busied themselves diving up the heavier goods that had gone to the bottom. This was more difficult than it seemed. Jack had located his rifle with his feet, but when he stooped under water to get it he floated to the surface before his fingers could touch the weapon. Then Robert, coming in with the carcass of a wild turkey that

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was drifting away, drove a pole in the mud and climbing down it brought up Jack's rifle. Returning, he groped about the bottom gathering in cartridges, cooking utensils, and heavy stores.

"I suppose you came out to find us?" asked James of his Patrol Leader, while both were getting their breath after diving up goods.

"Partly," was the reply. "There was a rumor in Myers that your outfit had been burned in a prairie fire and that you had since been seen in the Everglades. I thought your folks might be anxious and I called to tell them that the whole troop would turn out and hunt you up if they wanted us to."

"Were they worried?"

"Your father wasn't. He thanked us very much, but said that you and Rob would like nothing better than to lose everything you had and start out in the

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wilderness with nothing but the clothes you stood in."

"I wish you could have seen the clothes he did stand in!" interrupted Robert. "He wasn't respectable."

"Your father said," continued Brady, "that you were in a warm country with plenty of fresh water and that you could gather fruit, dig out palmetto buds, rob birds' nests, run down young birds, catch frogs and turtles and, rather than starve, eat a snake or two. Did you do any of those things?"

"Did 'em all, and then some," interposed Robert, while James inquired:

"Why did you come if Father wasn't worried?"

"I thought your mother looked anxious and when she asked if there wasn't danger from poisonous snakes, I said the only danger was of your being spoiled for home-life by the fun you were having. I told her that Jack and I were so

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envious that we were going to start out on a hike for ourselves and that we were such copy-cats that we might make for the Everglades."

"What did Mother say to that?"

"She said she liked that kind of copy-cats and—but the rest was private."

"See here, Chief," gasped Jack, who was exhausted by a long stay under water, "I'd like to be in on these revelations. Can't the spieling be put off till the council-fire has been lit?"

"Scout Beardsley, you speak wisely and your tongue is not forked. My young men will keep silent until called upon to tell of their deeds at the council to-night."

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CHAPTER XV

THE BOY SCOUTS CAMP ON THE PRAIRIE

WHEN the Boy Scouts reached Boat Landing their leader ordered them out for a hike with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, excepting that he carried a small bag of salted and soaked corn-meal and a small piece of bacon, while Jack slung on his shoulder the wild turkey he had shot early that morning. Brady led off for miles on a cart trail across the prairie, at a pace that made his followers pant, when suddenly he sprang to one side as a rattlesnake in the path coiled quickly with its head high and its buzz-saw going. Robert, who was following the leader at double quick, leaped forward and with the kick of a football player

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struck the reptile in the neck and stretched its stunned body at full length in the path. A few furious stamps with his heel crushed the creature's head and the boy turned to the leader for the compliment he expected. What he got was:

"Robert, that was a foolhardy act, unworthy a Scout. You periled your life for a bit of petty bravado. The Boy Scouts don't stand for that. If you had done it to save even a dog, it would have been different," and the leader turned from the trail into the grass of the open prairie and walked on more rapidly than before.

It was a country of snakes, and hidden in the grass through which the boys were wading were moccasins, brown, speckle-bellied and cotton-mouth, and prairie rattlers and diamond-backs, but Brady kept on with his head high and an air that said he wouldn't turn aside for a python as big as a barrel, until Robert slyly inquired if it would be foolhardy to

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walk among snakes without looking where he stepped.

"You are an insubordinate youngster," laughed the Chief, "but I am afraid you are about right this time."

The patrol leader brought the Boy Scouts to a group of a dozen tall palmettos on the prairie where he found a pool of clear, sweet water.

"We camp here," said he. "Robert, what implements of civilization have you on your person?"

"Only a pocket-knife, sir."

"Very well. Here are two matches, all there are in camp. You will build the camp-fire with them."

"I can do it with one."

"There is but one," replied the leader after breaking the other. "Here is a small bag of salted corn-meal, a piece of bacon, and a turkey. You are to provide a good supper, properly cooked and well served. Every dish that fails to pass inspection will be thrown away and if you

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fail to start the fire with your one match the whole camp will go supperless to bed."

"Won't that be a little rough on the rest of the camp?"

"Possibly it will, but it may also result in some little embarrassment to yourself. In the event of your failure the council will assemble at once and its first duty will be to ascertain why the council is without fire and the camp without food. You are not to speak again until you are prepared to say, 'Supper is served,' or 'I have failed to accomplish my task.'"

Robert wouldn't have failed for a kingdom, after that, and he feared but one thing, the dread of which hung over him as he splintered the big dried leaves and gathered bits of bark and wood for the sure starting of the fire. "What if the match won't light? What if it sputters and goes out?" he repeated to himself till the moment to try it came.

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His hand trembled as he held the match looking for a place to strike it. His shoes were wet, his garments of braided grass wouldn't do, the rough trunk of a palmetto didn't appeal to him and worst of all, his companions were reading his thoughts as each one watched him. Then Jim taunted him:

"Why don't you light it on your breeches, Bobbie? That's the way hunters and sailors do."

Like a flash Robert's nerve came back and there was no more indecision as he placed the end of the match between his lightly closed teeth and drawing it quickly forth steadily held its full blaze beneath the thickest bunch of splintered palmetto leaves. Tiny flames streamed upward, lapping dry grass and bits of bark, and curling about the big dry petioles of old palmetto leaves. As the fire blazed high Jack clapped his hands but was rebuked by Brady.

"He boasted that he could build the

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fire with one match. He has made good and that is all. Why should he be praised for it?"

Robert made a mat of green leaves, placing it beside the pool and pouring the corn-meal upon it. He added water slowly, as he stirred until the proper consistency for hoe-cake was reached. Propping it before the fire he built a broiler of green withes, covered it with thick slices of turkey alternated with thin ones of bacon, and fixed it over the coals. When the hot hoe-cake and broiled turkey with bacon were served up on palmetto leaves to the hungry Boy Scouts, not even Brady had a criticism to offer.

When all had been eaten, a council was ordered and the Scouts sat in a wide circle around the smoking embers of the dying fire. For a long time the leader said nothing for he knew the impressiveness of long silence when nerves are keyed up with anticipation. Seldom

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does occasion teach one this great lesson in its fulness.

I have sat in a council of Comanches an hour during which not a word was spoken. Old warriors and young braves sat in a great circle on the prairie beneath the mystic rays of the round full moon. Slowly the pipe was passed, smoked by each in turn, filled, passed and smoked again. I thought of it first as a joke, then as some strange mummery, but at last was carried away by some spirit of the past and lived in the legends I had heard and was part of the tales I had read. Leather Stocking was real to me, the wise Chingachgook was in our circle, and crafty Mingoes were all about us. Even Hiawatha wasn't quite a dream and when at last a great chief of the Comanches rose, slowly bared his scarred breast and lifting his hand burst into oratory, I forgot that I knew little of his language, since I didn't need to, for I understood *him*.

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When James was called upon he told his story of adventure better than I have done, for the spirit of the Great Outdoors, that hovers over every camp-fire, inspired him. Robert's story was full of the sentiment of the wilderness, but told in a more serious vein than was the custom of that volatile youth.

"Will you strike the homeward trail across the prairie?" asked Brady, after the stories had been told.

"No," replied James. "We mean to go home by way of the big lake—Okeechobee."

"What! Cross Okeechobee in that little contraption of a canoe?"

"'Three wise men of Gotham went to sea in a bowl,
If the bowl had been stronger, my story'd been longer,'"

chanted the irrepressible Robert.

"Our worst trouble will come before we reach Okeechobee. We have twenty

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or thirty miles of the Everglades, just where the saw-grass is heaviest."

"Jack and I will discharge our Indian, manage our own canoe, and go with you as far as Okeechobee. How is that, Scout Beardsley?"

"Sure Mike, we will, Chief, only I want some of that Seminole business in mine. We can't have these fellows putting the kibosh all over us at the council-fires after we go home."

"Of course we won't have that, and after we have left them at the Big Lake we will inspect their camp in the Big Cypress and call on their Seminole friends. Can you make a map that will help us find them, Scout Howard?"

"Map!" shouted Robert. "Why Jim's got one in his head, the beautifulest thing you ever saw, a regular geodetic survey, measured in millimeters and figured down to the last lily pad. You might get an X-ray picture of it, or else take his head with you."

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"Looks as if you would have to make that map, Howard, to save your head," said the leader, "but taps will be sounded now and the order for the morning is a hike at daylight for Boat Landing."

"I don't feel like an explorer, a bit," said Brady after James had worked with him all the morning, making maps and notes, describing trails and landmarks, outlining the course followed from Coon Key, and even sketching a bird's-eye view of the country as seen from the top of the mastic tree which Robert had discovered. "Why, a blind man could keep the trail with the directions you have given."

"A blind Indian might, for a Seminole has a sixth sense to tell him where the trail lies. Conapatchee described this trail that I have marked so plainly that I thought it must be a country road and probably fenced. I knew about where it must be from this live-oak land-

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mark but I couldn't see it even after we were in it."

While James was map-making with Brady, Robert was giving Jack lessons in the management of a Seminole canoe. As the latter rose from his eleventh tumble into the water he sputtered:

"Seems to me, Bob, that your system of teaching me to pole this tub consists of getting me to stand up in it and then rolling me out."

"When I undertake to teach a fellow to pole a canoe, my system is to teach him or kill him. Usually I kill him. Throw your weight on the pole and let the canoe slide. Don't try to lean your weight back on the pole and forward in the canoe at the same time. I don't mind your going overboard but there's always a chance of your rolling the canoe over and getting me wet. There, that was something like. Learn to let yourself go, and I'll make a man of you, yet, Jack."

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The day was given up to the study of trails, practise with canoes, and getting together the few supplies needed for the Okeechobee trip. When next the sun rose the little canoe was being steadily driven through the hissing grass, with its prow to the north and Boat Landing behind it. Following closely but wavering occasionally came the bigger canoe of the Patrol Leader, driven by his own sturdy but unskilled strokes, aided by Jack who imperiled his equilibrium each minute by practising the stroke that Robert had taught him. James was the pilot and held to his course like the needle to the pole, following the Seminole trail without faltering, alike through flooded meadows, among scattering lily pads and over watery wastes broken only by an occasional upthrusting blade of grass.

"Can you really see any trail?" asked Brady as he pushed his canoe near that of the pilot.

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"I can see it, or feel it, when I don't look for it. Just fix your eyes on that grass in the northeast, then let them rove along the horizon toward those trees in the northwest. Don't think of trails but see if something doesn't catch your eye a little west of north."

"I thought I saw something that looked like two trails but I can't make it out now."

"You picked it up all right. Our trail divides a little way ahead of us and the one we take turns toward that heavy grass to the right."

"Where does the other trail lead?"

"It leads to some woods and prairies, about northwest, I reckon, probably where you see the tops of those trees above the horizon."

"How do you know all that?"

"I am not sure that I do know it, Chief, but it is my very best recollection of what Conapatchee told me and sketched for me. He said there was

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'ojus echu, and *panewa,* and maybe so *kecha'* there. That means a heap of deer and turkey and some panther."

"What did your Seminole tell you about the trail we are following?"

"Said it went through the big Saw-Grass all the way to the Big Lake and that only alligator-hunters used it. We may be cut up some by the saw-grass."

"What will we find to eat?"

"Only what we take with us, unless Robert can pick up some birds with his bow and arrows, or Jack with his rifle, unless you want to try alligator-steak."

" 'Why look'st thou so?—
With my crossbow I shot the albatross,' "

quoted Robert. "Better not trust too much to my bow, for it might mean albatross, or it might mean turkey-buzzard."

"We won't trust anything to it. We might be a week getting through that strand of saw-grass, James."

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"Might be twice that."

"Our motto is 'Be prepared,' and if there is a chance of our spending a week in that jungle we must provide against hunger. Scout Howard is commanded to pilot the canoe squadron as near the Happy Hunting Grounds he talked of as he can carry the craft."

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CHAPTER XVI

TRAILING A HUNTER

ALL the Boy Scouts were pledged against killing the beautiful creatures of the wild, but there wasn't one of the four whose heart didn't beat a bit faster and who didn't pole with a trifle more energy at the thought of the necessity of stocking the larder with game. The trail they followed led to the shore and up a little creek near a piece of woods. Brady ordered a halt at a grassy bank, crowned with straggling cedar and near which were palmettos, water- and live-oak. As the canoes drew up to the land, Jack was the first to leap ashore. His foot slipped on a tussock, doubled beneath him, and he fell

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to the ground. He attempted to rise but fell back, saying:

"Guess I've sprained my ankle." James and Brady were at his side in a moment and carried him a few steps to a level place on the bank. The leader began to unlace the shoe from the already swelling ankle, calling out as he worked:

"Hot water, you fellows, quick as you know how to make it!"

"Ready in a minute," replied Robert, who was already at work, and with James helping, the water boiled in so brief a time that it would have spoiled the record of many a Camp-Fire competitor at Chief Scout Seton's Windygoul. Brady bandaged the ankle with a big bandanna, dipped in water as hot as Jack could bear it, repeating the operation every few minutes for half an hour. Then, when Jack protested that the pain was gone and his ankle well, a cushion of Spanish moss was placed under his

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foot and he was ordered to lie still until permission was given him to move.

"Now, boys," said the leader, "get busy with supper while I hunt up some crutches for Jack."

"But, Chief," protested that youth, "how can I help hunt, if I must carry crutches?"

"You can't. I'm sorry, Jack, but you mustn't put the weight of your finger on that foot for twenty-four hours, and I'll tell you then whether you must be good to it for a fortnight."

"This accident to Jack," said the Patrol Leader at the council that night, "raises some questions that call for a vote. He may be all right in a day or two, or he may not be able to walk in a fortnight."

"Please, Chief, don't let this make any difference in the plans. I know I'll be well to-morrow, and anyhow I could sit down and pole."

"I vote, too, that we don't change

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plans," exclaimed Robert. "If you'll take Jim in the big canoe I'll put Jack in the bow of the little one and pole it alone, and I'll bet any member of this honorable body that I won't fall five lengths behind in a day's march."

"My vote goes with Jack's, Chief. I know how I'd feel if I were in his place," said James.

"That settles it without my having to vote. Will you take Jack's rifle in the morning, James, and pick up a deer for us? Robert might get a turkey with that bow of his."

"But, Chief, why not let Robert take the rifle? We want some venison for jerking, in a hurry and he is the best shot."

"All right, let him take the rifle, you, the bow and arrows, and I'll stay in camp and get fuel and fix up a platform to smoke the venison."

"But, Chief—"

" 'But me no Chiefs,' Robert. There

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will be no change in orders. You are to be off at daylight and are expected to be back with a buck before noon."

Robert was off at daylight, though he didn't get back at noon.

When James started out a little later with bow and arrow, Brady called to him:

"You are not going for turkey with only one arrow?"

"I'm not going for turkey at all. I want a bigger mark than a turkey, so it's a deer or nothing."

"But why only one arrow?"

"The others are too light and too blunt. Bob found an old penknife blade at Boat Landing and lashed it in the split head of his arrow. See!"

"Fine job. Robert will grow up into a good Indian."

James crept through woods and bushes to the borders of little glades for an hour before luck came to him. Then

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from behind a thick cluster of Spanish bayonets he saw within easy range an antlered buck feeding on a meadow. But what was easy range for a rifle, or even a shot gun, was too far for James with a bow. He was to leeward of the quarry, which grazed toward him till the fingers that clutched the bow tingled, and James leaned forward in his excitement while unnoticed the tiny bayonets of the armed plants pierced his flesh. The buck wandered away and James wanted to kick himself for not having tried a long shot. Then the creature came toward him, grazing for a minute, lifting his head and looking around, then feeding again. Straight for the waiting boy he came, forty yards away, now thirty, twenty—and with head held high, nostrils quivering, the startled buck gazed into the eye of his enemy behind the bayonet barrier. As James stepped from behind the thicket, weapon in hand and ready, the deer swung quickly about

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and was broadside toward the boy as the two-foot steel-pointed arrow left the bow. Chance-favored, the missile sped between the ribs of the quarry, and its steel point was buried in his heart.

When James reached the camp with his burden of venison the leader pointed significantly to the sun, still casting its shadows to the west, saying:

"You wanted me to give Robert the rifle because you couldn't shoot. It isn't noon but you are back, loaded with game. Robert started before you, where is he?"

"He should be here. I heard a shot from his rifle soon after I started and made sure he'd be back in camp with a buck in an hour."

"Perhaps he missed the buck, or whatever he fired at."

"He doesn't know how to miss with a rifle. Maybe he shot a turkey and has kept on for something bigger."

Soon the carcass of the deer had been

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cut in thin strips and stretched upon scaffolding beneath which a fire was kept smoldering.

"We'll be ready to start for Okeechobee as soon as that venison is jerked," said Brady. "I've been working Jack's ankle and find the sprain isn't a bad one. He can walk a little in a day or two, but he will have to be careful of his ankle for weeks."

As night approached James became anxious about Robert and wanted to start out in search of him but was dissuaded by the leader:

"He may be lost, but that won't hurt him and if you start out to-night there'd be two of you lost. You and I will have a hunt for him in the morning while Jack looks after the camp."

"But I don't want to look after the camp. My ankle is perfectly well and I want to help find Bob."

"You can help best, Jack, by staying right here."

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Brady and James, with two day's rations, started on Robert's trail as early in the morning as they could see it. Often it was plain and they followed it rapidly, but sometimes they lost it so completely that they had to study the ground, foot by foot, in ever widening circles, for what seemed hours of lost time to the anxious Boy Scouts. Frequently James suggested striking out and ranging more widely, hoping to chance on the trail, but his calmer companion held him down to the surer, if slower, method. The Patrol Leader clung to his principles through all the stress and strain of a long day even when the lengthened shadows that presaged dusk found them advanced on the trail scarcely more than could have been covered by an hour of brisk marching. Suddenly came his reward as the tiniest golden ray was reflected to his eye from the ground near him. There was a gleam of triumph in his expression as he

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held up to his companion's gaze the shell of a .22 rifle cartridge. From here the trail which had been leading west turned sharply south and crossed a bit of soft ground on which the steps of the boy they were following showed that he had been running.

"We'll soon find blood on the trail and know what he fired at and what he has been following since," said James. "If Robert wounded a deer he would think it his duty to follow it so long as he could find a trace of the creature."

"He's stopped running, Jim, at the foot of this tree and turned off to the right and—See, Jim, see! There's the biggest kind of a panther track and there is blood on the grass."

"What do you make of it, Chief? It isn't possible that Robert has been hurt?"

"Hurt? Not a bit of it. Robert shot the panther with Jack's little .22 and the beast doesn't know he's been killed.

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Look at these tracks in the mud! The panther is running on three legs. We don't have to ask what has happened, for it is written down plainer than print. The panther was crouching on this limb when Robert broke its shoulder from a hundred yards away with that baby rifle."

"That's just the way he shot the other one, at Royal Palm Hammock, Chief. The skin of that one was burned and now he's got another. Doesn't the boy have luck?"

"He may not have got this one, but he will cling to its trail as long as he can walk, so we have got to overhaul him before he starves to death."

"Here is where they went into this awful swamp and it's too dark to follow the trail. Couldn't we manage with torches of dried palmetto leaves?"

"No use, Jim. We would wear ourselves out and not get anywhere. We will keep a good fire going in this open

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place and if Robert is anywhere near here he will see it and find us."

"I hope he won't try it. There is more danger in that snake-infested swamp than in forty panthers."

"And that is the swamp you want us to go into to-night?"

There was little rest for the Boy Scouts that night, for through its long, long hours their anxiety kept them awake.

"That's the blessedest thing I ever saw," said James, of the rising sun which made it possible for them to resume their search in the dank recesses of the swamp.

It was a terrible trail they followed for the most of that day. They were torn by briers, lacerated by thorns, scratched by thickets, bruised by their many stumblings, and covered with the mire of the swamp. They never lost the tracks of the panther and the blood marks were frequent, while always in

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the trail, walking, crawling, and floundering like themselves, was the evidence that Robert had preceded them. At least no harm had come to him then, was the thought that cheered them from time to time. Their course had been crooked and confusing and when late in the day the trail led the Boy Scouts out of the swamp, they were in great doubt of the direction of the camp. They had stopped for a moment's rest, as their last struggle had been a hard one, when James turned to his companion, saying:

"I'm ashamed to tell you, Chief, that I am lost and don't know the direction of the camp. I haven't thought of much to-day but keeping on Robert's trail."

"Neither have I, and it was my business, too. But we will stick to the trail we are following till we find Bob and then getting back to camp won't bother us long."

"Surely not, for it lies somewhere to the east of us and the minute we strike

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the Everglades I can make straight for it. But, Chief, the trail is turning back into the swamp and it's getting dark in there already. I am afraid Bobbie will starve before we find him."

"Jimmie, Jimmie, look away ahead there, between these trees, half a mile I should think."

"I see a lot of birds. Chief, they are turkey-buzzards!"

"Yes, and we must start a fire here to find our way back and then see what those buzzards are waiting for."

"You don't think it is possible that anything has happened to—"

"No, I don't, and you mustn't even think of such a thing. It might be the panther that Robert shot and I hope it is, for then we'll find him."

As they neared the place above which the buzzards were circling, James shouted several times, and then kept on, his heart beating wildly with apprehension. A few minutes later the "Thank

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God!" that burst from his lips, as tears rolled down his cheeks, was fervently echoed by the Patrol Leader. For there lay the carcass of the panther, stripped of its skin and its head gone.

"Now, James, we will follow Robert's trail as long as we can see it and then camp."

"I wonder if he kept better tab on camp than we, through all the excitement of the chase. I believe he did, for he is making a straight course, mighty close to the right one."

For half an hour the Boy Scouts were able to follow the trail at a rapid walk and as it grew dark they tried to keep on by the light of palmetto torches when they were startled by a distant report.

"That's from Robert in camp," shouted James, "and we can drop trailing and keep straight on as long as we can see a tree or a star."

Before it was too dark to travel, the light of the camp-fire shone upon them,

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and after a joyful reunion and a prodigious supper a Boy Scout council was held at which the skin, skull, and teeth of Robert's panther were praised and the story of its pursuit told by Brady and James without Robert having occasion to correct their version. Yet no story at the council was better than Jack's humorous account of the excitement of his days in camp.

"Alone, alone, all, all alone," as Robert quoted. He told of his bird guests, from the cardinal that wakened him with its liquid music, to the Everglade kite whose graceful curveting beneath the blue sky of noon was a feast to his eye and the shrouded buzzard that came with the evening shades and perched upon a tree above him, ill-omened as Poe's raven. The tree-rat and the rabbit, the white-nosed, white-eared fox squirrel and the funny little spotted skunk had all called upon him and half of them had been welcomed. Owls

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called to him in the night, the soft steps of creatures that walk in the dark, the rustling of leaves to the gliding of serpents, the shrill sounds from insects on the trees, and the soft beatings of night heron's wings filled his ears, until a nightmare came with its horrid fancies of companions eaten by panthers or lost in the wilderness.

When taps sounded, the commands for the morning were breakfast at daylight, the breaking of camp and packing of stores in the canoes on the double quick and

"Ho! for the saw-grass and Okeechobee."

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CHAPTER XVII

THE PARTING AT OKEECHOBEE

"THIS trail is a peach, easy as pie and no chance of losing it," exclaimed Robert, as he drove the light canoe through the narrow channel between the forest-like growth of the cruelly-serrated saw-grass. Jack, his canoe mate, stood in the bow struggling to make his strokes light and to put as little weight as possible upon the sprained ankle, for the leader had threatened to take away his pole and make him sit on the bottom of the canoe, if he were caught putting undue strain on the weakened muscles. An hour later the Leader called a halt to give the panting Scouts a rest.

"Did I speak of this trail as a peach? I meant a lemon. This canoe weighs a

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ton and sticks to the grass like a burr. Every time I push it ahead a foot the pole sticks so fast in the mud that in yanking it out I haul the canoe back eighteen inches," complained Robert.

"You ought to be thankful that you don't have to navigate a battleship like this," replied James.

The water had been growing shoaler, the grass thicker and taller, and the heavier canoe was almost immovable. Robert tried wading in the trail ahead of the little canoe and dragging it, while Jack helped with his pole, not being allowed to step outside of the canoe. After they had made fifty yards Robert went back to help drag the bigger canoe.

"Gee, but I'm melting," said he.

> " 'All in a hot and copper sky,
> The bloody sun at noon,' "

he spouted as he sank on the bow of the canoe.

The near-tropical, almost vertical

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rays of the noonday sun beat down between the walls of grass that rose several feet above the heads of the boys and shut out every breath of air. There was no call for a midday meal, and with Brady and Robert hauling at the bow and James pushing at the stern, the big canoe moved on. Moccasins were plentiful in the trail and as Robert kicked them aside, he glanced slyly into the face of the Chief, expectant of a rebuff that didn't come.

"Hold on a minute, Chief, I want to haul from the bow. I don't like pushing," shouted James.

"Better not come, Jimmie, for there are snakes here. I see 'em," said Robert.

"That's why I want to get there, so I can see them, too. The first I know of them here is when I step on them and I hate the squashy feel of the squirmy things and I expect every minute to be bitten."

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The water deepened a few inches and Brady and James were able to handle the big canoe, so Robert went back to the little one. Soon he called out:

"Pilot Howard, the trail divides and a branch turns off to the right."

"Which trail is the better?"

"Neither, each one is worse than the other."

"Then, keep to the straighter one."

When daylight began to fade the Leader called a halt for the night.

"Why not go on, Chief?" asked Robert. "We're all too tired to eat or sleep and if we kept on we might get somewhere."

"Half an hour's rest will make you feel like eating, all right, and besides I don't want to walk among moccasins in the dark."

"And I don't want to walk through saw-grass in the dark, Chief. I've been cut to pieces already and can't see my

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hands for the blood on them," said James.

"You are a bloody lot all around and I am going to administer 'First aid.'"

Then the Patrol Leader bathed the cuts and scratches of the Scouts with peroxide of hydrogen and smeared the wounds with carbolated vaseline. The Scouts had brought from their last camp a small supply of fuel and Jack built a fire on a little earth carried in an old dish-pan. He prepared a round of hot coffee, followed by a savory venison stew, accompanied by cold cornbread, of which he had made a large quantity while in camp. Despite the distresses of the day the camp that evening was a jolly one for the air was pleasantly cool and the Boy Scouts knew that their surroundings were unlike anything that others of their great order had enjoyed. When taps were sounded and they lay down on the bottoms of the canoes, which

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were kept from capsizing by the saw-grass, Robert was heard to remark:

"It will take an earthquake, a hurricane, or a fire to get me out of this canoe to-night."

Unprophetic boy! Of the four elements, he named three, and it was the fourth that got him. About midnight a tropical storm burst upon the Scouts. For minutes at a time the lightning was incessant and the roar of the thunder never out of their ears. When the rain came it was a deluge that made the boys gasp for breath and cover their faces with their hands or turn them away from the flood. As Robert lay, face down, the cold rain, wind-driven, drenched and chilled every bit of his body till his teeth chattered and he shivered, feeling that, like Harry Gill after Goody Blake had cursed him, he could "never more be warm."

There was yet other trouble in store for our friends, for the water rose rap-

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"'THERE'S A BIG, OLD ALLIGATOR IN THE TRAIL. SHALL I SHOOT HIM?'"

Page 227

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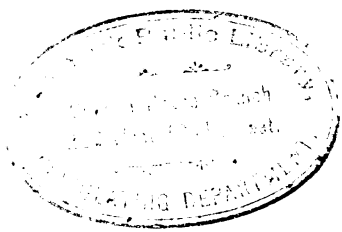

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idly in the canoes and soon all were lying in puddles that threatened, if the storm should continue, to rise and drown them. The rain ended as suddenly as it began and the boys bailed out their canoes in the dark and, though later they got some sleep, none of them have since been heard to speak of that time as the happiest night of their lives.

For five days they moiled and toiled, sometimes getting on wrong trails, once trying to make a short cut through untraveled saw-grass, but quickly giving up the attempt, and finally finding a lighter growth and more open sky that gave them hope of soon reaching their goal.

"Chief!" called out Jack one morning from his post in the bow of the little canoe, "there's a big old alligator in the trail. Shall I shoot him?"

"No, Jack, we don't want to eat him and we don't need his hide."

"But he looks as if he wanted to eat

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us. I had better have my rifle ready in case of attack. 'Be prepared,' you know." The Chief laughed as the alligator turned around and skurried down the trail.

Robert poled the little canoe after the reptile and soon found the water deepening and the grass thinning out until a little cove was reached opening on the Big Lake—Okeechobee.

There was a good breeze from the north and long waves came rolling in till their force was broken by the heavy grass in the shoaling water.

The hour for the parting had come, but all were loath to speak of it. The life together in the open, the anxieties, and especially the hardships of the past few days had brought the companions very near each other. Now Brady and Jack were to fight their way back through the Big Saw-Grass, visit the Seminole camps of which their companions had told them, and the Boy Scout

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camp which those companions had constructed.

After this the Scout spirit was certain to lead them to explorations and adventures of their own.

"What will be your course now, James?" asked his Patrol Leader.

"I think it is about twenty miles by lake to a short canal that leads to Lake Hicpochee. From there a few miles by canal bring us to the Calooshatchee River. From there we ought to run down to Myers in two days."

"This rough water would be play with your old canoe, but it's too rough to tackle with a hollowed-out log."

"You are going to see us tackle it in about five minutes, Chief, unless you forbid it officially," interposed Robert.

"I have no right to do that. When we separate the responsibility is all in your hands. But I don't want you to run into danger."

"We are not going to be foolhardy,"

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said James. "If the canoe really won't ride the waves we will give it up and wait for smoother water. If it does get swamped we can get into shallow water and wade ashore with it. So good-by Chief, and thank you for coming for us and all the rest."

"Me, too, Chief, only I've got to tell you something that will make you mad. Maybe my badge will be taken away, but I'm going to own up and take my medicine, whatever it is."

"I am sorry to hear what you say, Bobbie, but perhaps it isn't quite as bad as you fancy."

"It's worse, Chief. You know when you were coming out to help us, and we met in the canoes and you were so hearty and cordial in your greetings?"

"Of course I remember the meeting. Wasn't I clumsy enough to roll everybody overboard?"

"No, you weren't, Chief! I did that mean trick myself and I want you to

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know just how sorry and ashamed of myself I am for doing it."

As Robert spoke, Brady turned his back on him. Robert wasn't surprised, though James thought the Chief was harsh to refuse so frank an apology, when both saw that the Chief was moved by some violent emotion. He trembled all over with the effort to control himself and then burst into irrepressible laughter.

"So that was your crime!" he gasped. "You got your innocent, confiding leader out in a boat and ducked him good. You—you made him think—think that he'd ducked himself—self and all the rest of you. And you've kept—kept it up and had him apologizing all through the trip! Bob," and now his voice was serious, "don't you ever tell that in council or I'll have *my* badge taken away!"

And now the parting had come. James and Robert put out in their little

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Seminole dugout, riding the waves of Okeechobee, that each instant rose higher. Sluggishly the bow lifted to each oncoming wave, which, sweeping aft, rose high at the waist of the canoe, then hoisting the stern as it passed, plunged the bow deep in the wave that followed. There was little freeboard to the tiny canoe and often the crest of a wave spilled water over the side. Then Robert swung the craft till it quartered the sea, bearing west of north, when their course was northwest. No more water came aboard, but the rolling motion of the waves would have sent the young Scouts headlong into the lake but for the rigorous canoe-training of the Seminole Conapatchee. Minute by minute their footing grew steadier and they reveled in the joy of having conquered their craft. The water was too deep for easy poling, but their progress was good and though they were holding north of their true course, the side-drift of their

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hollowed log would compensate for that.

The Patrol Leader and Jack stood long in their canoe watching the course of their comrades which seemed more hazardous to them than to the boys in the boat. As the little canoe was receding in the distance it fell off for an instant into the trough of the sea and one of its crew was seen to stagger.

"Look, look, Chief! They are going to capsize!" exclaimed Jack. But the Patrol Leader replied:

"No danger of that. They are 'prepared!' They can paddle their own canoe."

THE END

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